Part Three of a Five – Issue Limited Series

THOUGHTS & IMAGES

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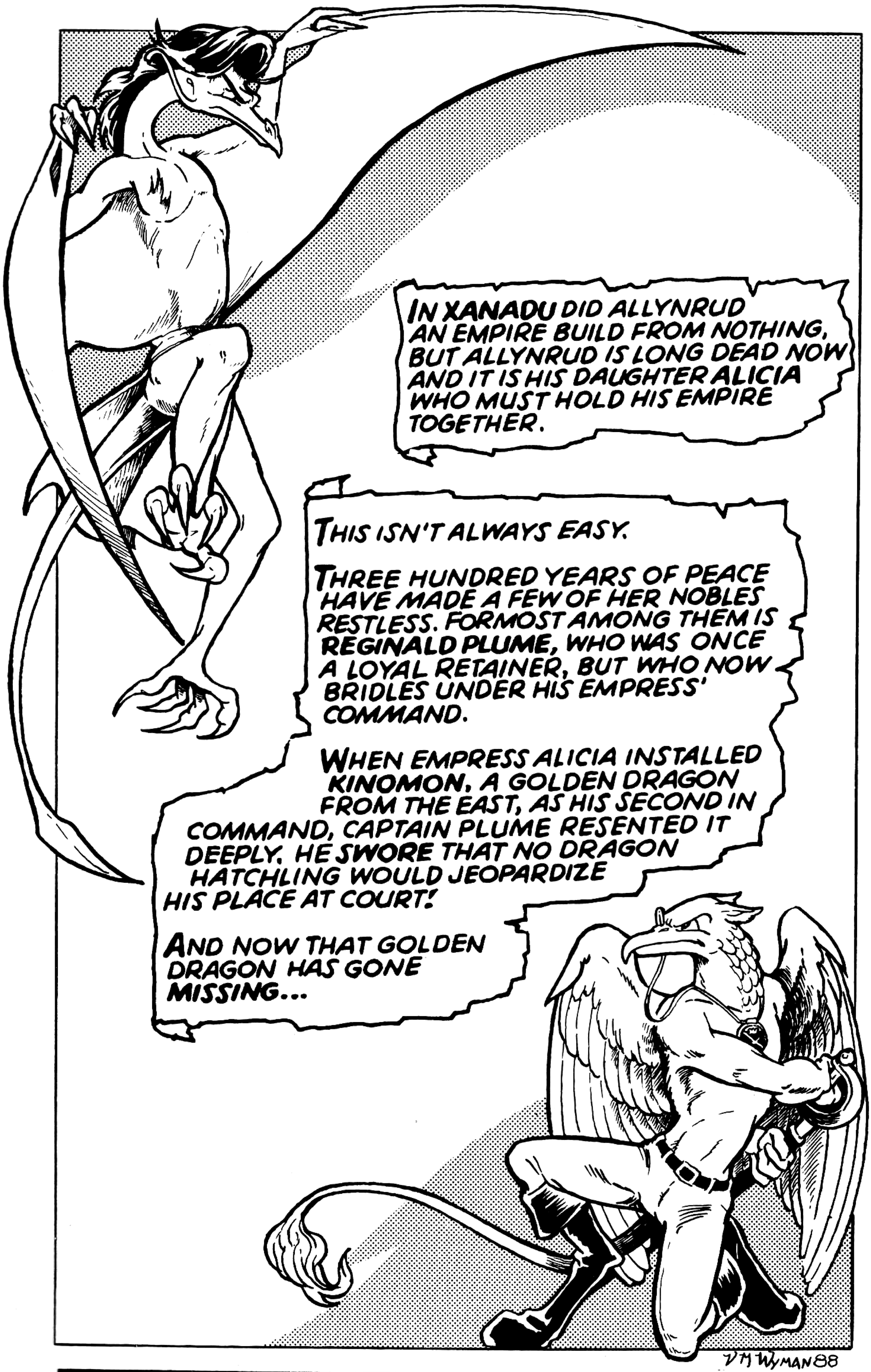
XANADU



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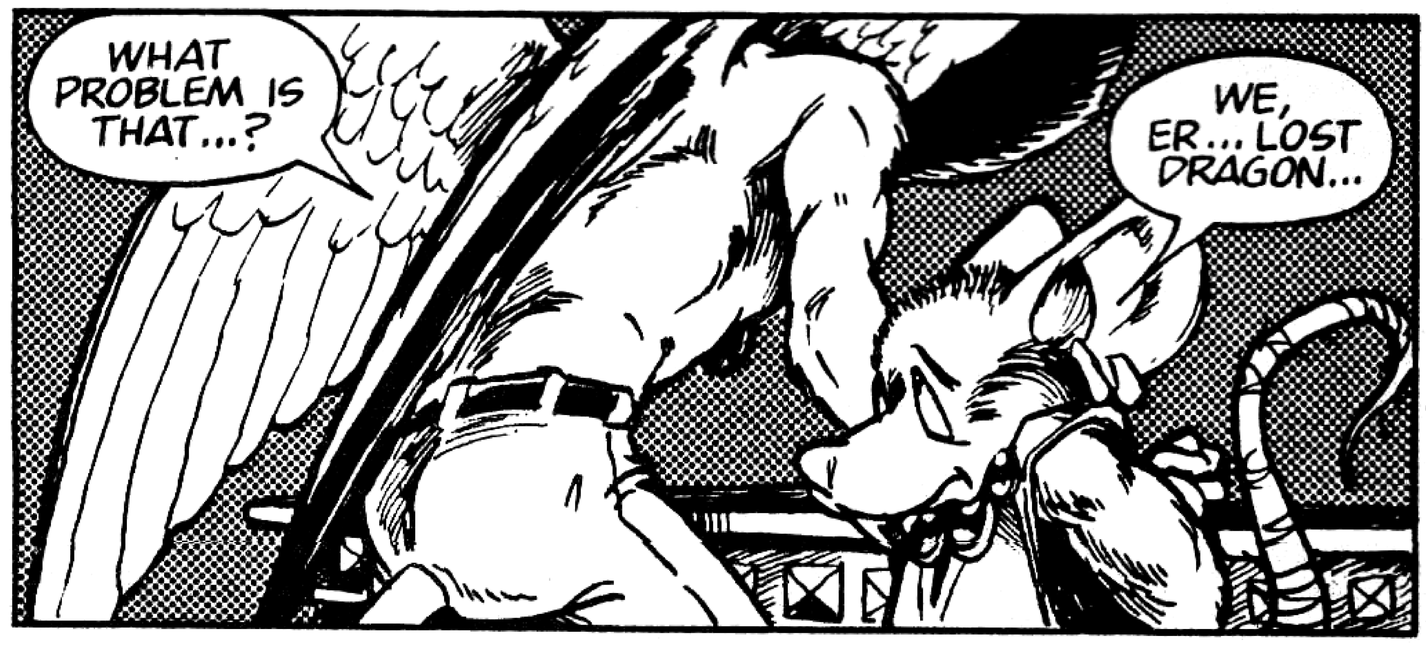
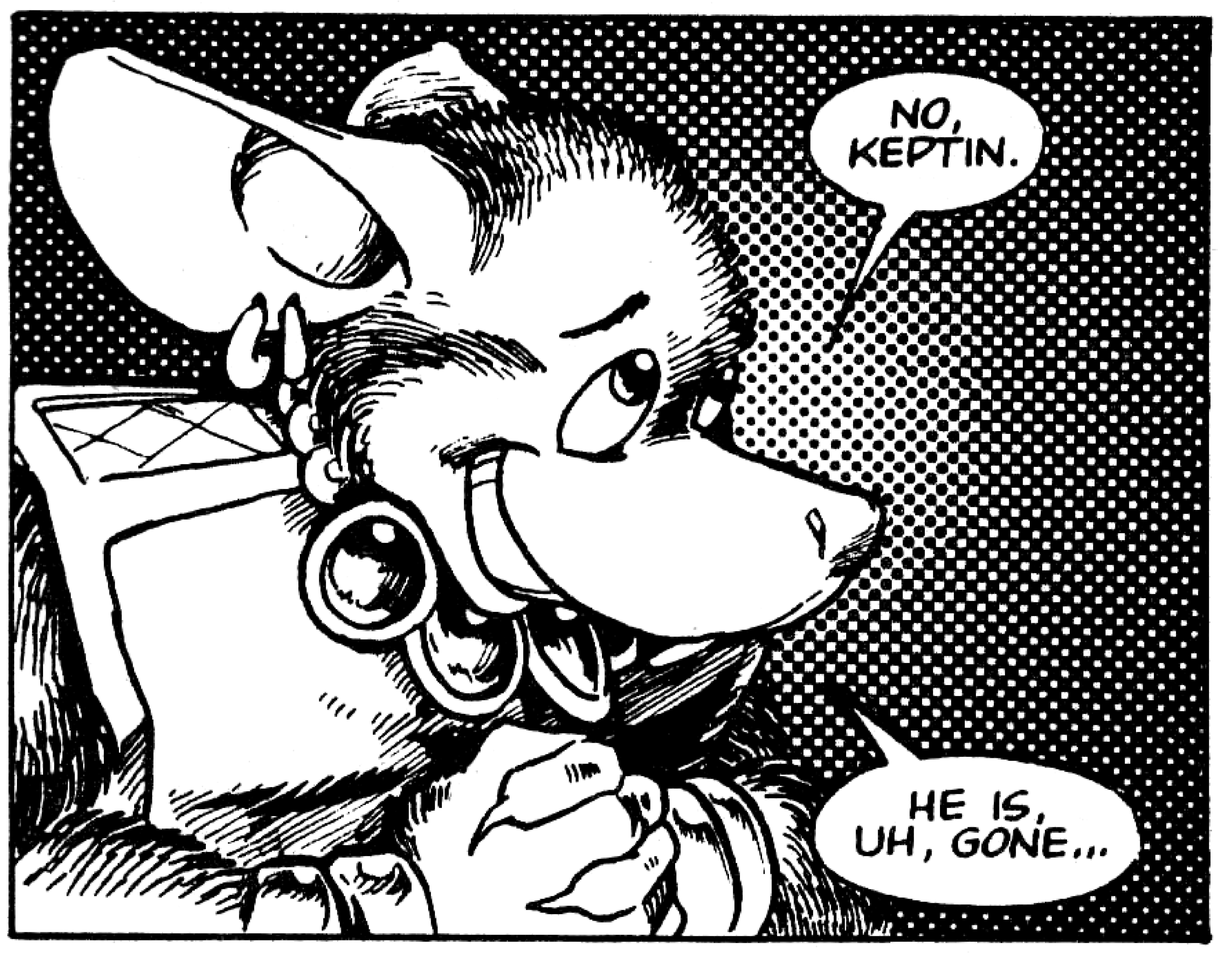
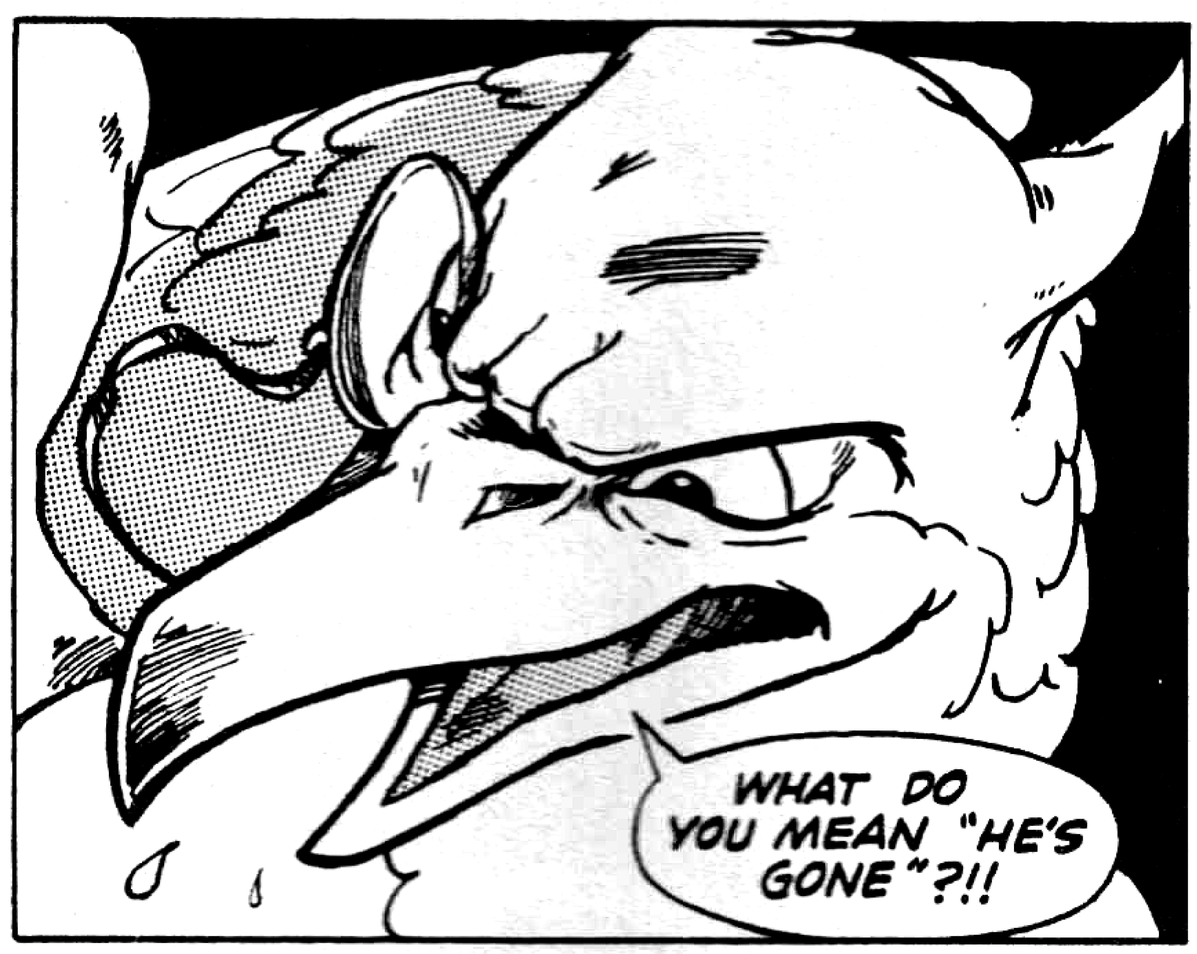
IT WAS ALL FOR NOTHING.
PRINCESS KAJIKO HAS TAKEN HER BROTHER'S PLACE...
I KIDNAPPED THE DRAGON KINOMON, JEOPARDIZED MY PLACE AT COURT, RISKED MY GOOD NAME AND PROBABLY MY LIFE AND IT WAS ALL FOR NOTHING...
I CAN'T OVERPOWER AN ADULT GOLDEN DRAGON.
THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO...
KEPTIN REGINALD...?
DON'T BOTHER ME NOW, SCRATCH. GO AWAY.

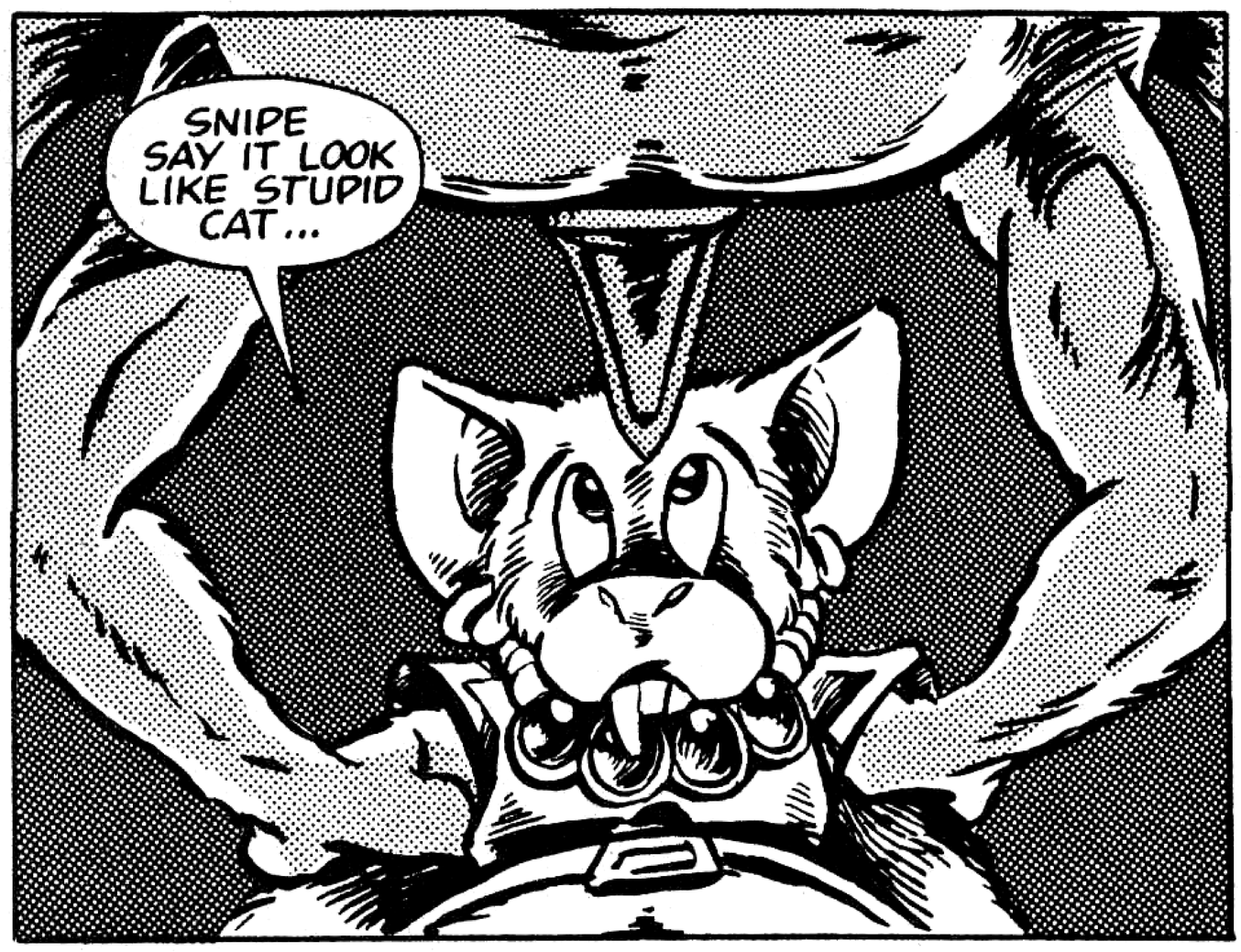




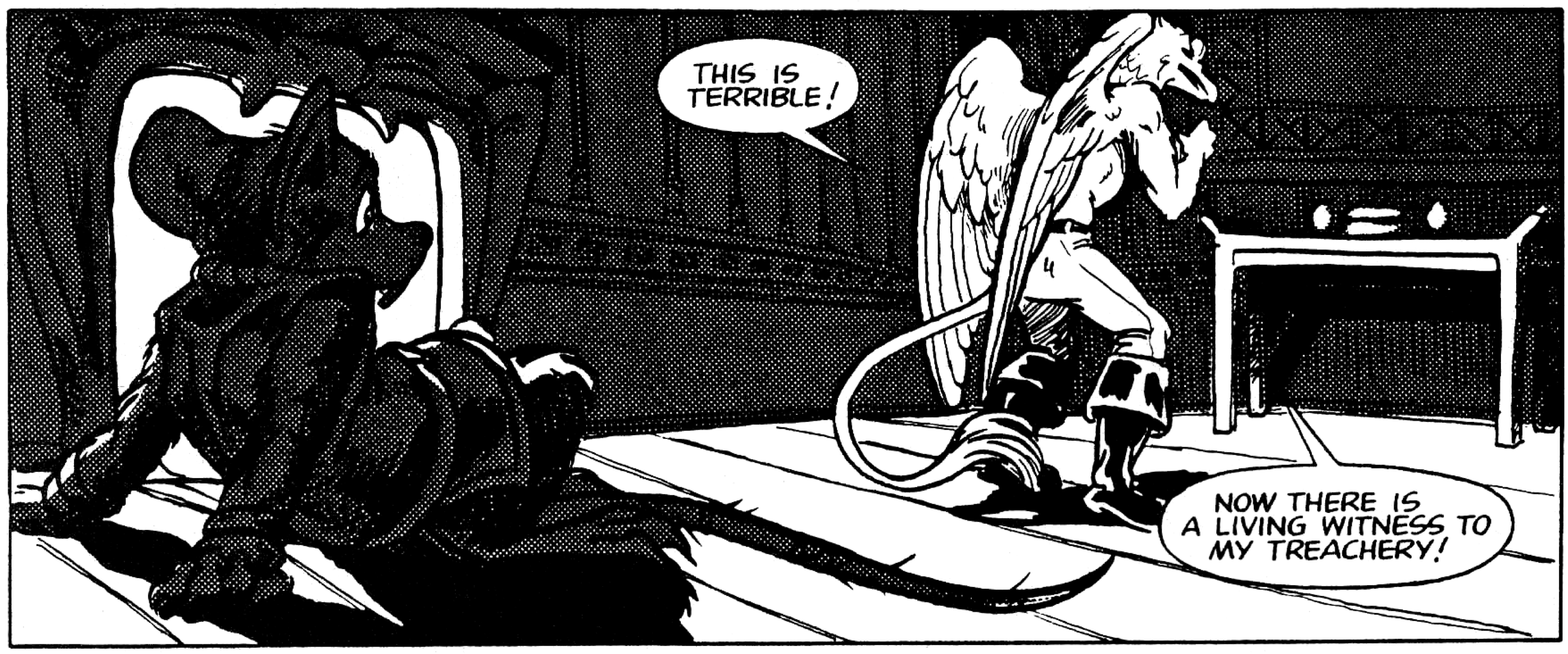


KVETCH AND I GO TO GET WAGON... SO WE COULD TAKE DRAGON AWAY, LIKE YOU SAID. WHILE WE GONE, SOMEBODY JUMP GRUHT AND SNIPE AND TAKE DRAGON...

WHO?


SNIPE SAY IT LOOK LIKE STUPID CAT...

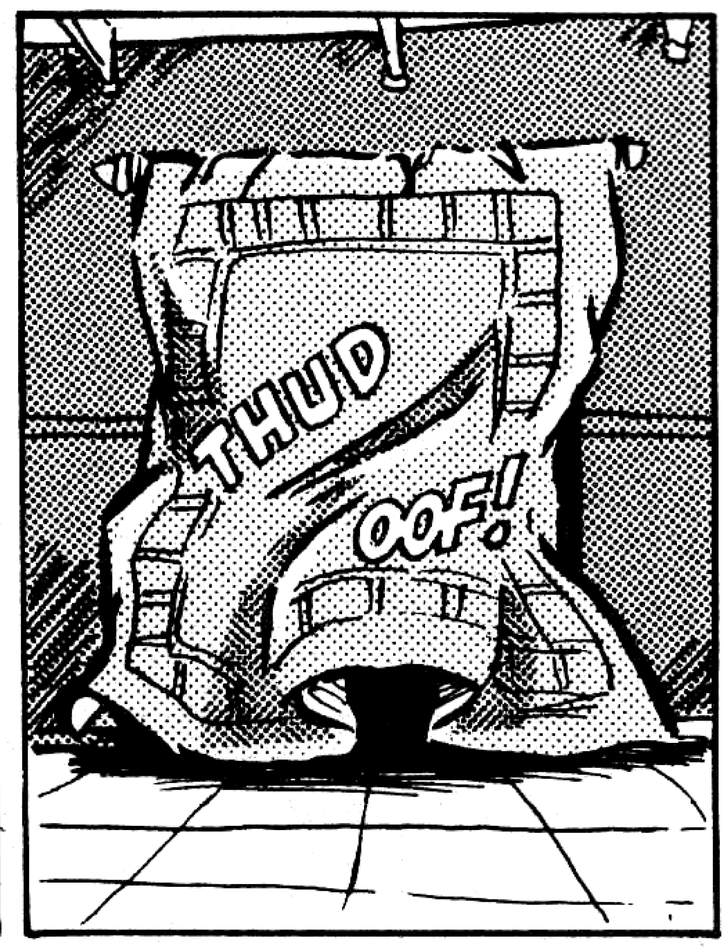
TABBE LE FAUVE!!? THAT MANGY DOMESTIQUE THIEF....?!!

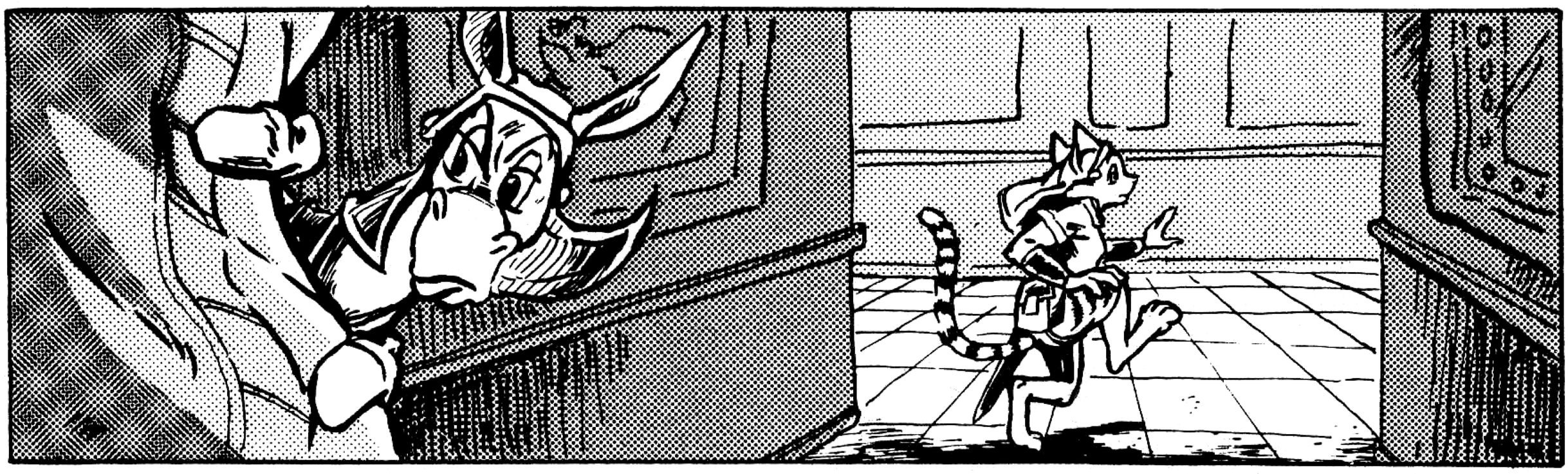

THIS IS TERRIBLE!
NOW THERE IS A LIVING WITNESS TO MY TREACHERY!

NOBODY BELIEVE STUPID CAT! HE OUTLAW.

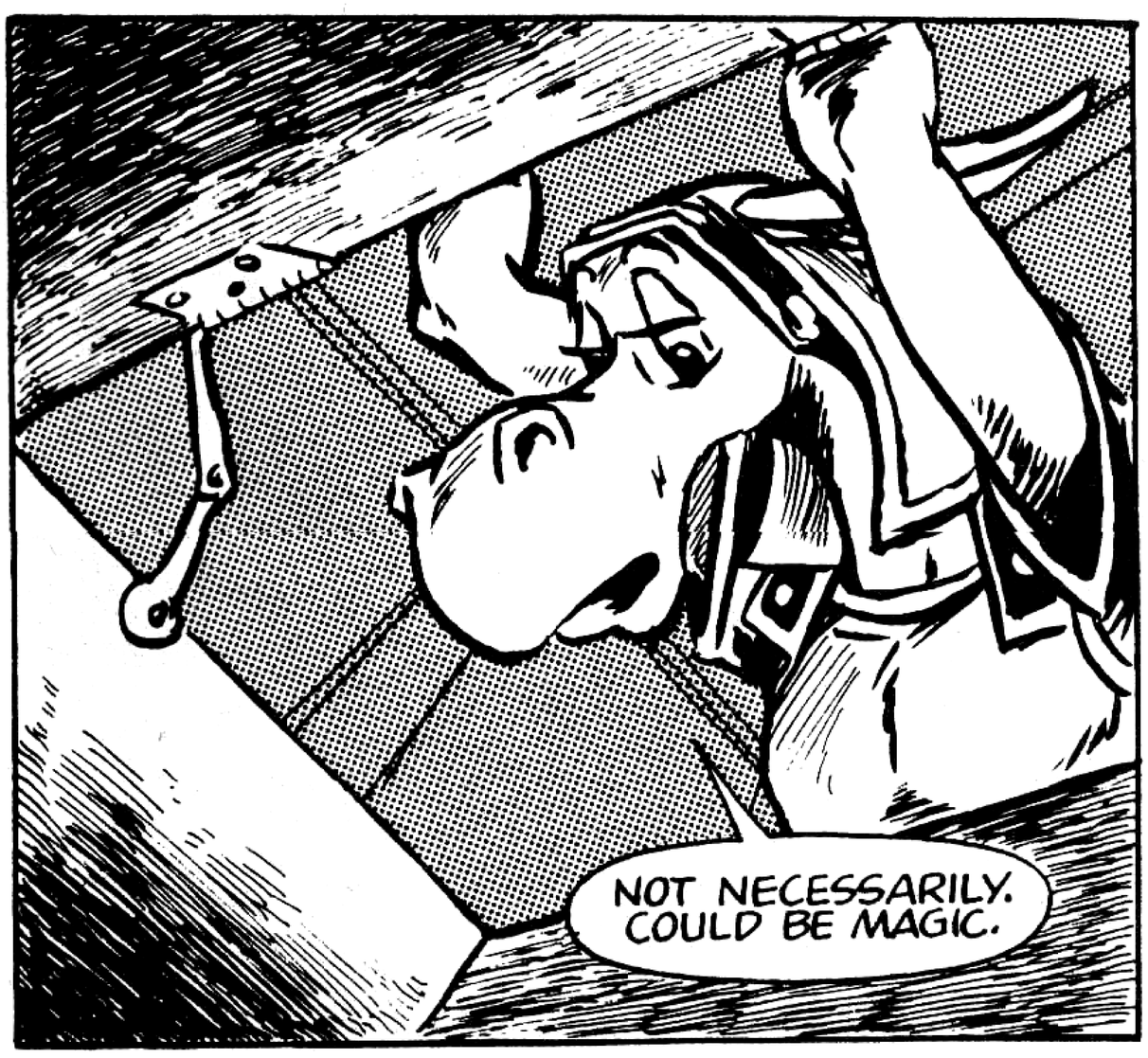
I'M NOT WORRIED ABOUT THE STUPID CAT! KINOMON IS ALIVE AND HIS WORD AS A GOLDEN DRAGON IS UNIMPEACHABLE! GO BACK TO THE WALLOWS, SCRATCH! DESTROY THEM! REMEMBER: IF I HANG, YOU HANG WITH ME!!

HERE WE ARE, RISKING OUR NECKS TO STEAL A GOLDEN WHAZZIT SO KINOMON CAN RELIGHT HIS FIRE AND RETURN TO COURT. WE MUST BE CRAZY!
CRAZY LIKE A FOX, MON AMI! IF KINOMON RETURNS TO COURT, HE WILL COOK REGINALD PLUME'S GOOSE!
AND SPEAKING OF FOXES...!
BON SOIR, FATIMA DEAREST! DID YOU MISS ME?
YES... AND I'M SURPRISED THE GUARDS DID. THIS IS VERY IMPLUSIVE OF YOU.
THAT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN TRYIN' TO TELL HIM...
HOW CAN I HELP YOU?
JUST TELL ME WHERE PRINCESS KAJIKO'S QUARTERS ARE. I'LL TAKE THINGS FROM THERE.
THE IMPERIAL GUEST QUARTERS ARE DOWN THIS CORRIDOR AND TO THE RIGHT. BUT KAJIKO'S NOT THERE NOW. SHE'S TALKING TO OCTAVIUS.
C'EST PARFAIT! FORGIVE THE BRIEF INTERLUDE, MY LOVE, BUT WE HAD BEST MOVE QUICKLY. A DRAGON'S HONOR IS AT STAKE!

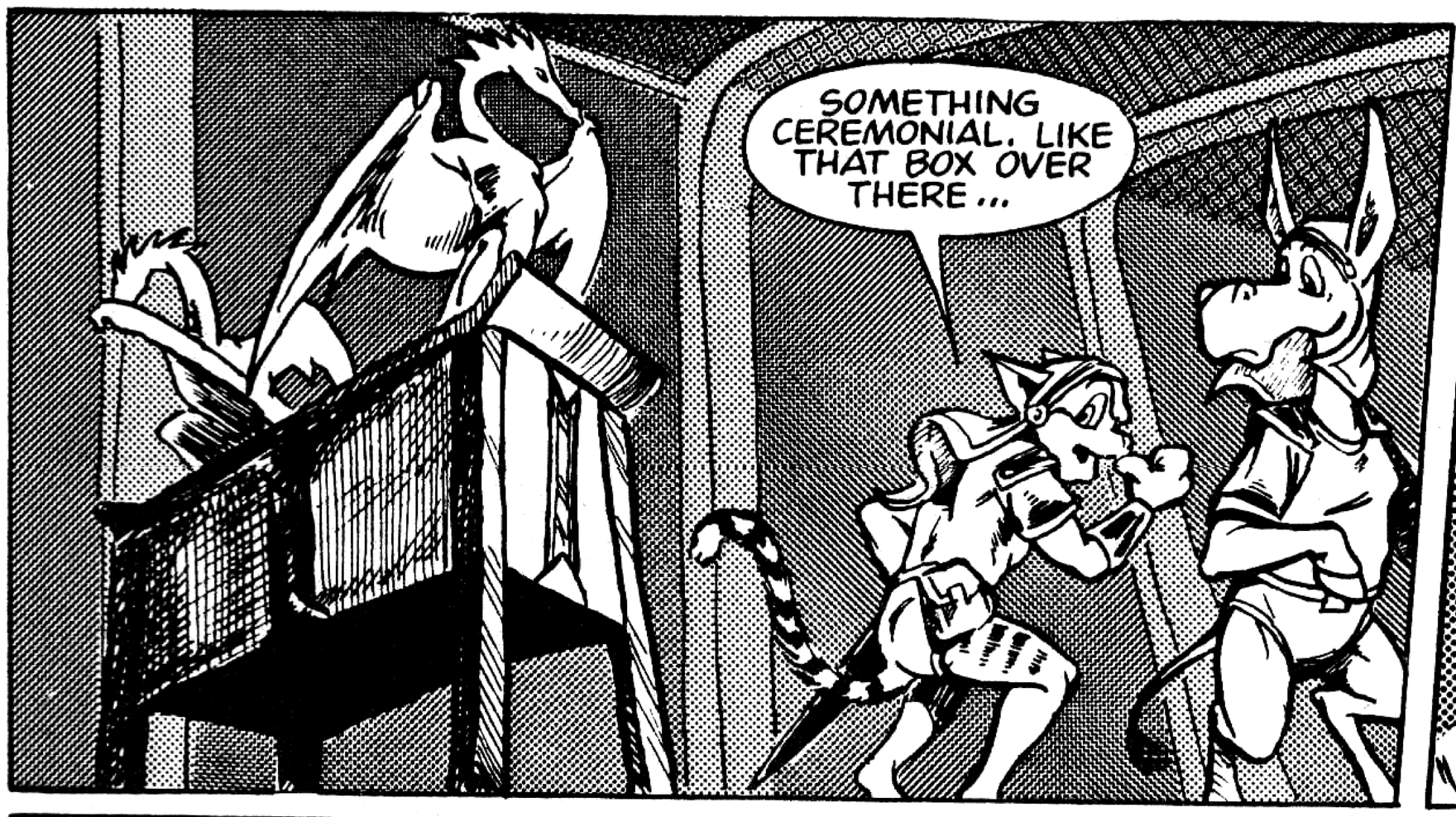

THUD
OOF!



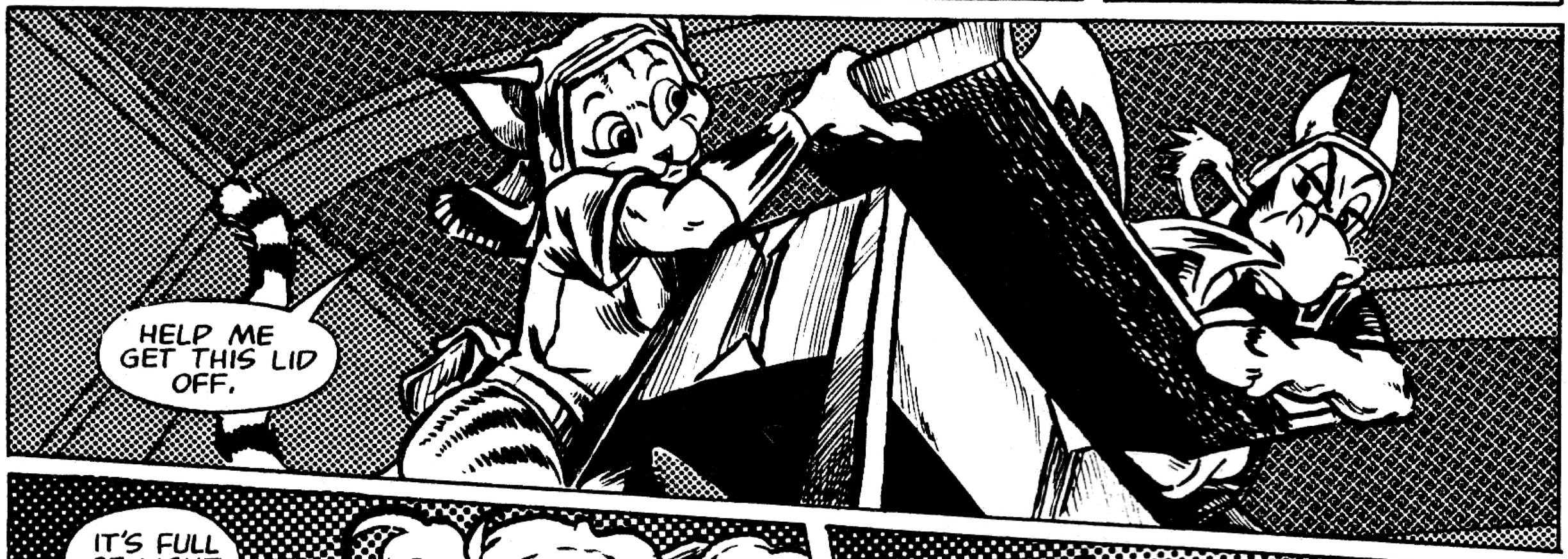
DO YOU KNOW WHAT A GOLDEN ESSENCE LOOKS LIKE?
NO, BUT IF IT LIGHTS DRAGONFIRE, IT HAS TO BE HOT.


NOT NECESSARILY. COULD BE MAGIC.

DON'T GET TECHNICAL ON ME! SEARCH!
IT'D HELP IF I KNEW WHAT I WAS SEARCHING FOR, TAB!


SOMETHING CEREMONIAL. LIKE THAT BOX OVER THERE...

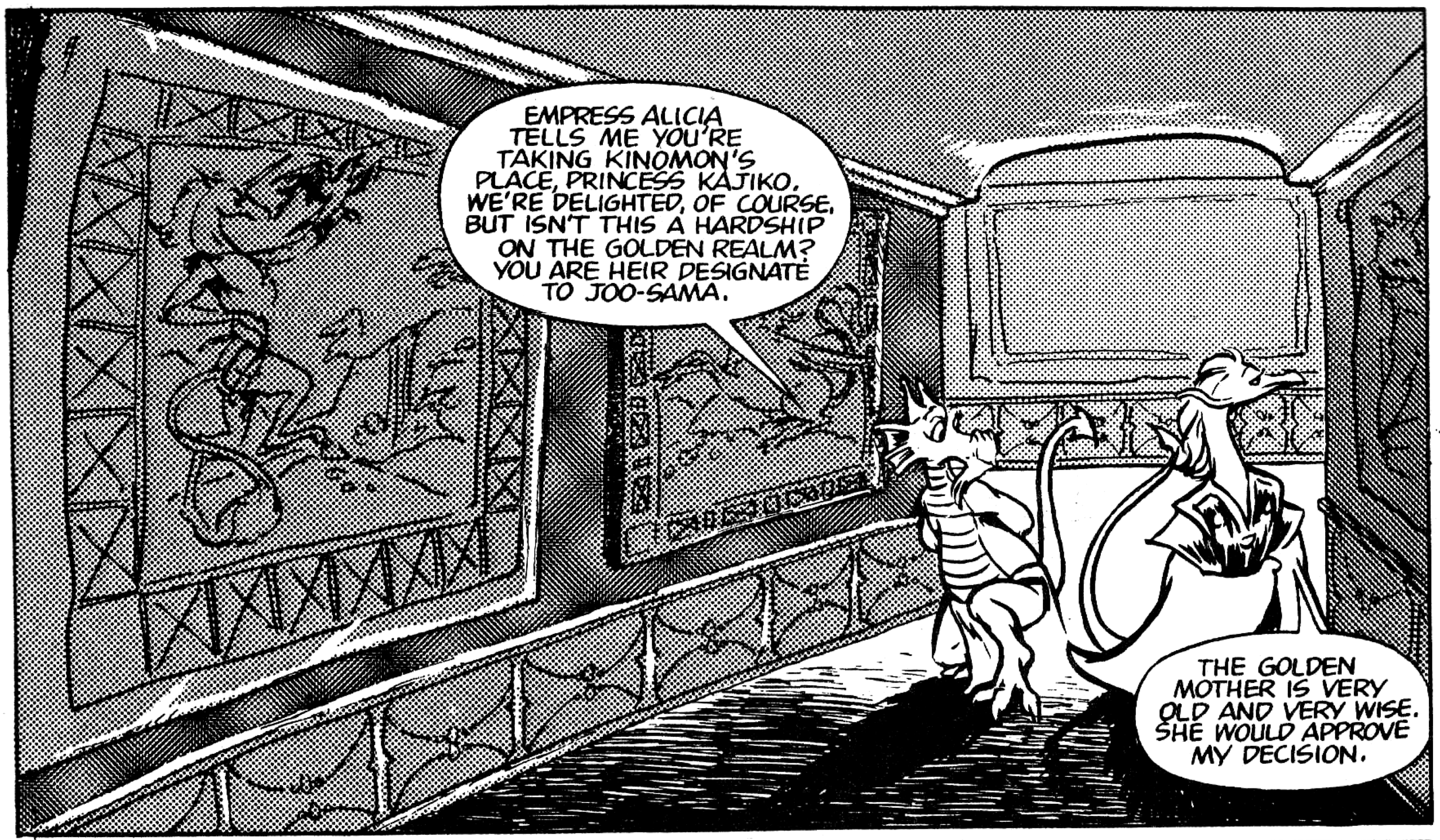
THAT'S IT!

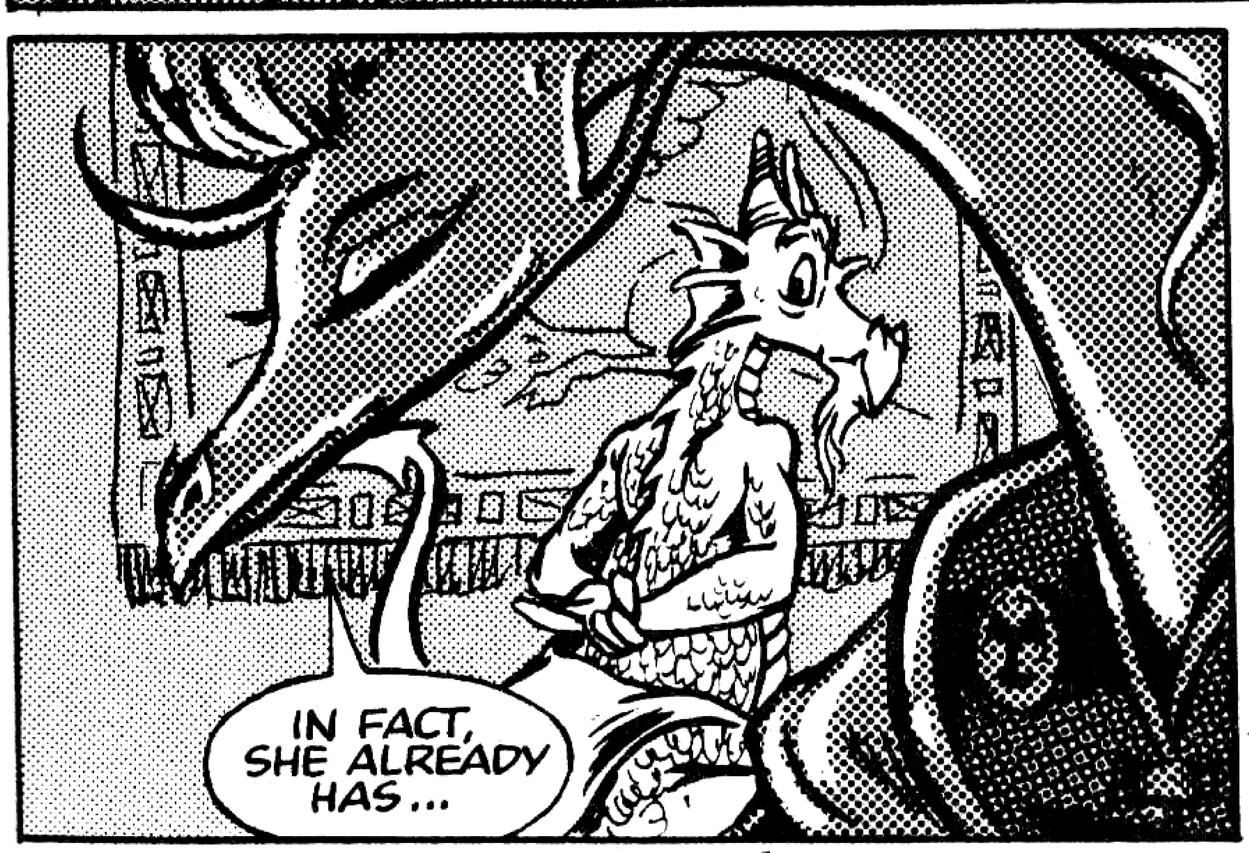

HELP ME GET THIS LID OFF.

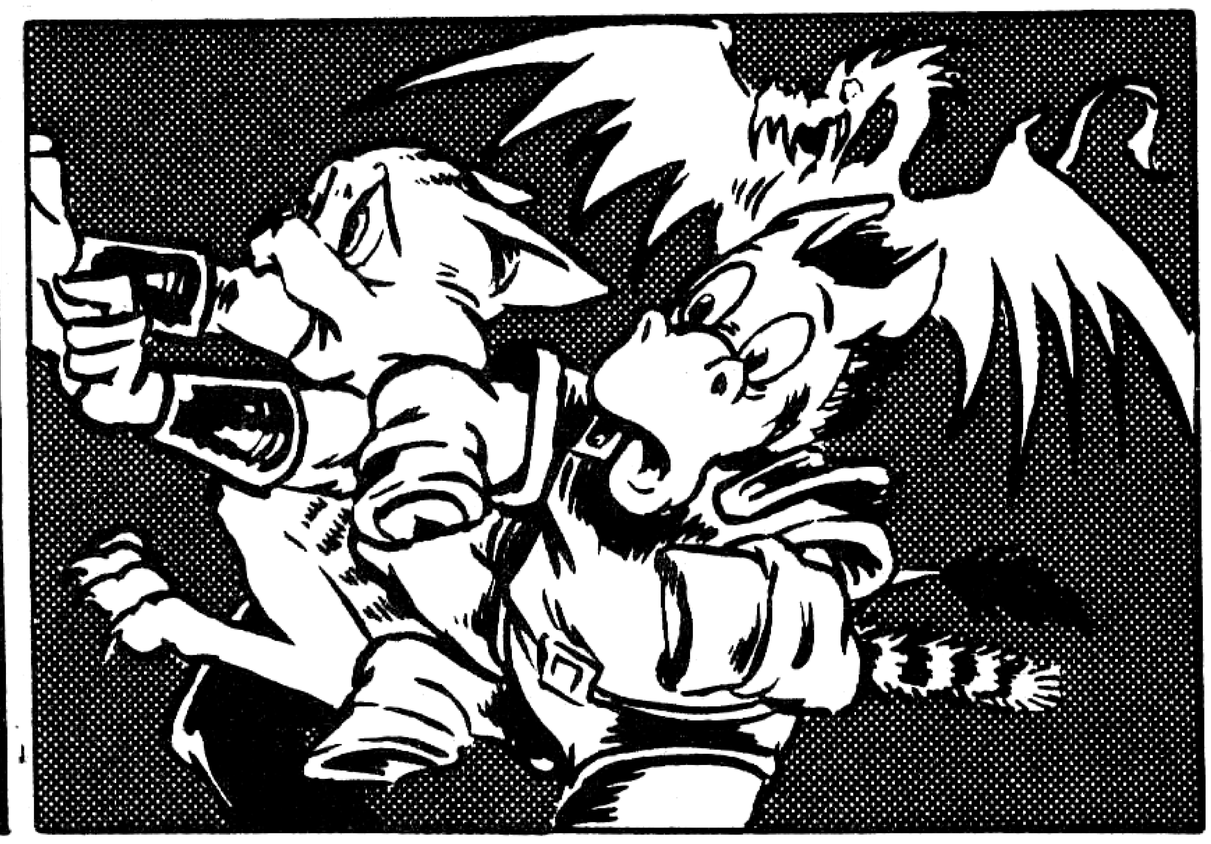
IT'S FULL OF LIGHT INSIDE...

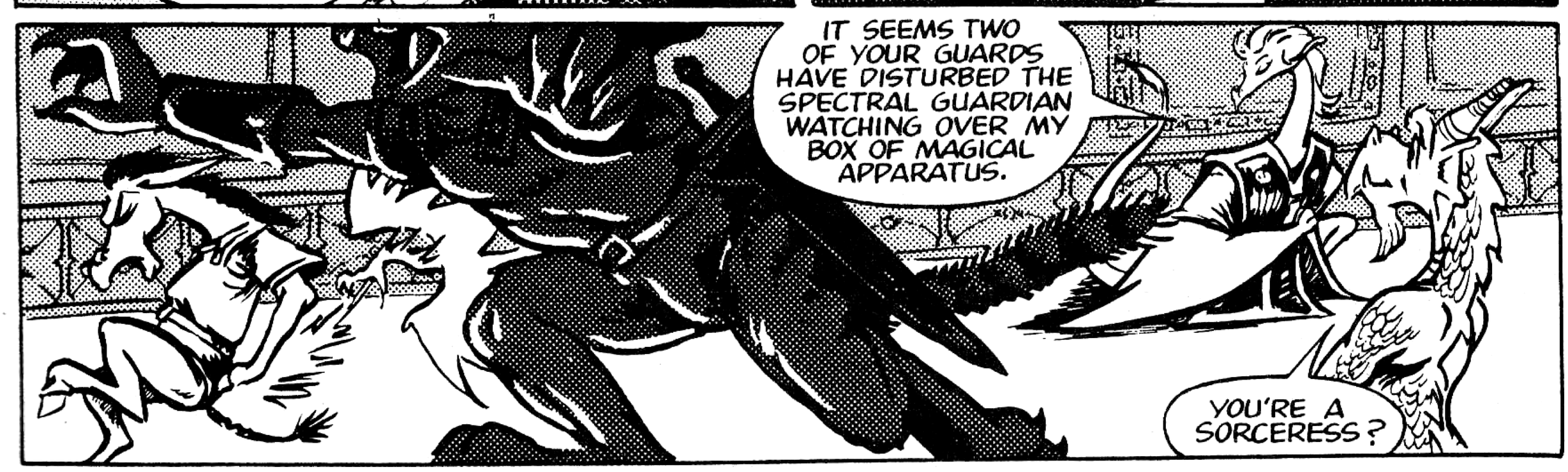
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING...

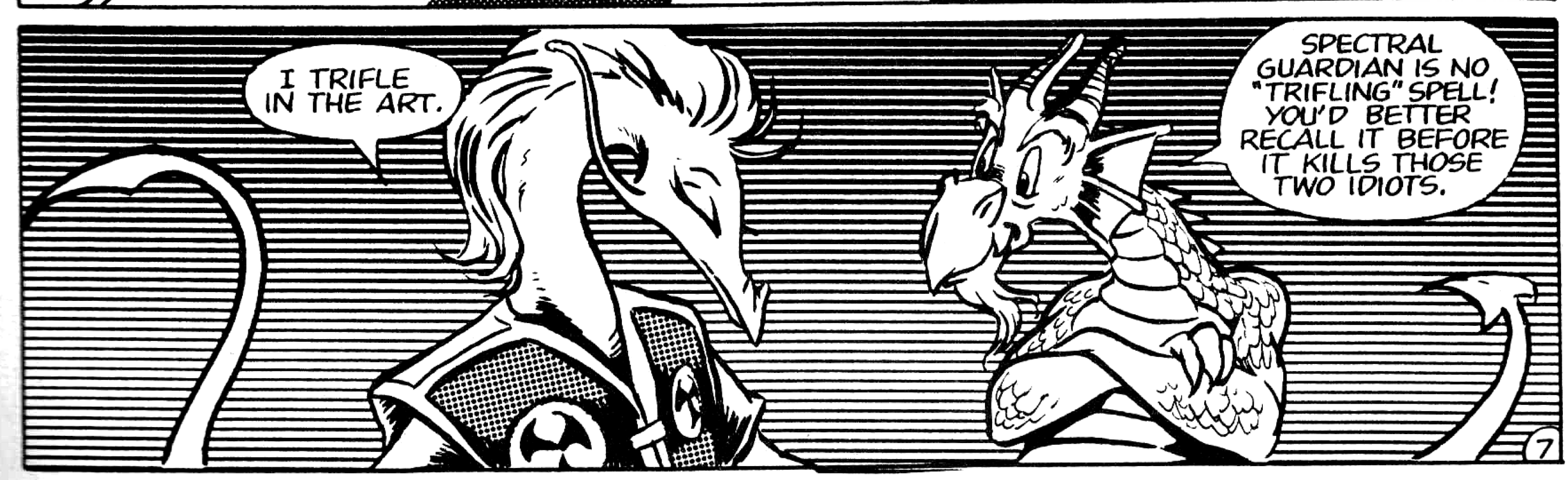
...OH, NO...


EMPRESS ALICIA TELLS ME YOU'RE TAKING KINOMON'S PLACE, PRINCESS KAJIKO. WE'RE DELIGHTED, OF COURSE, BUT ISN'T THIS A HARDSHIP ON THE GOLDEN REALM? YOU ARE HEIR DESIGNATE TO JOO-SAMA.
THE GOLDEN MOTHER IS VERY OLD AND VERY WISE. SHE WOULD APPROVE MY DECISION.


IN FACT, SHE ALREADY HAS...



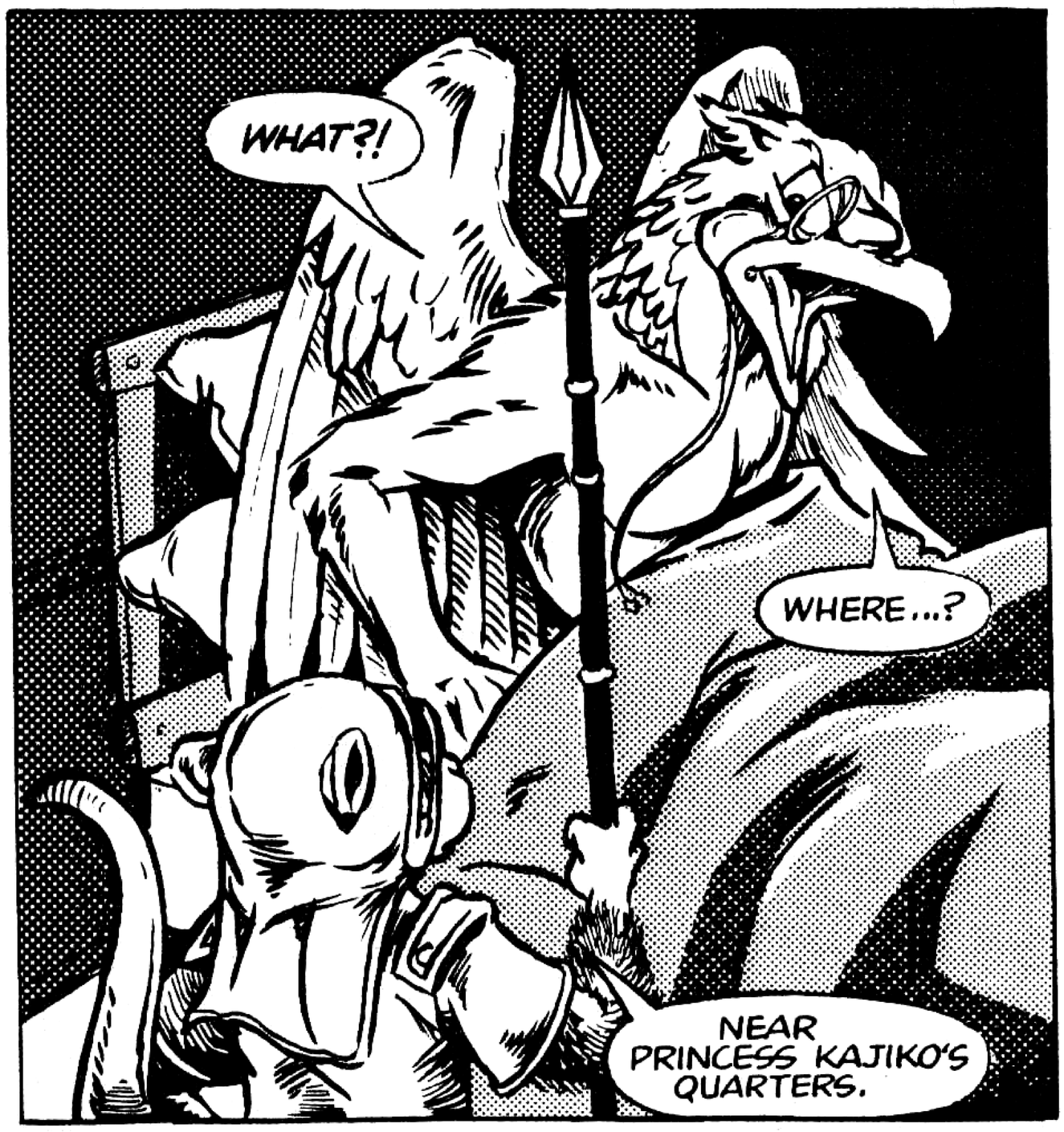

IT SEEMS TWO OF YOUR GUARDS HAVE DISTURBED THE SPECTRAL GUARDIAN WATCHING OVER MY BOX OF MAGICAL APPARATUS.
YOU'RE A SORCERESS?

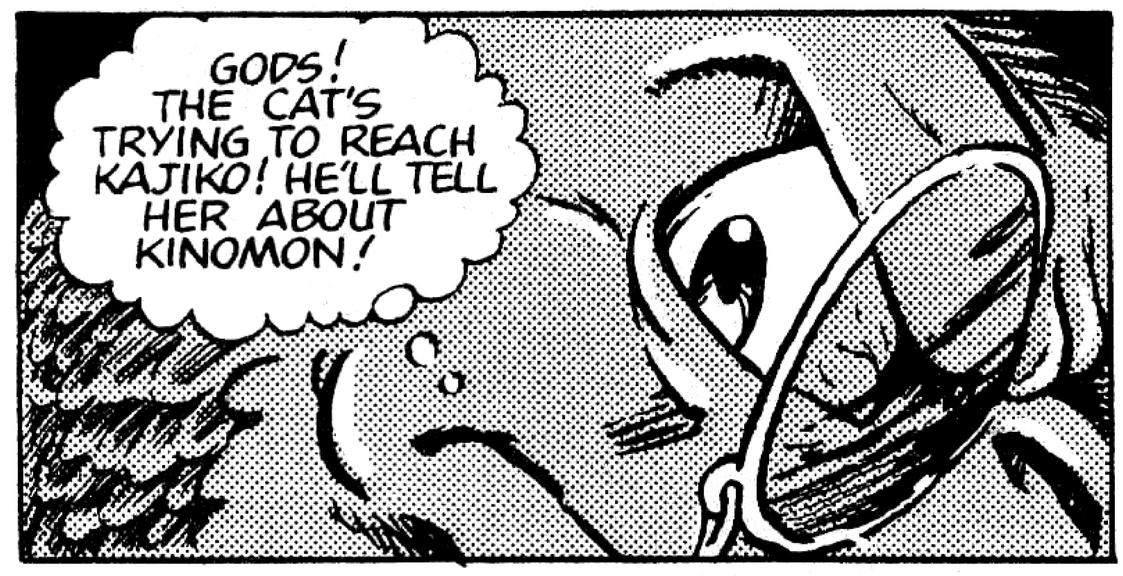

I TRIFLE IN THE ART.
SPECTRAL GUARDIAN IS NO "TRIFLING" SPELL! YOU'D BETTER RECALL IT BEFORE IT KILLS THOSE TWO IDIOTS.

WHY WERE YOU IN PRINCESS KAJIKO'S QUARTERS?
WELL, SIR... UH...
WAIT A MINUTE... YOU'RE NOT A GUARD...
YOU'RE THAT DAMNED THIEF TABBE LE FAUVE!
GUARDS! BRING CAPTAIN PLUME TO ME IMMEDIATELY!
RUN!!!

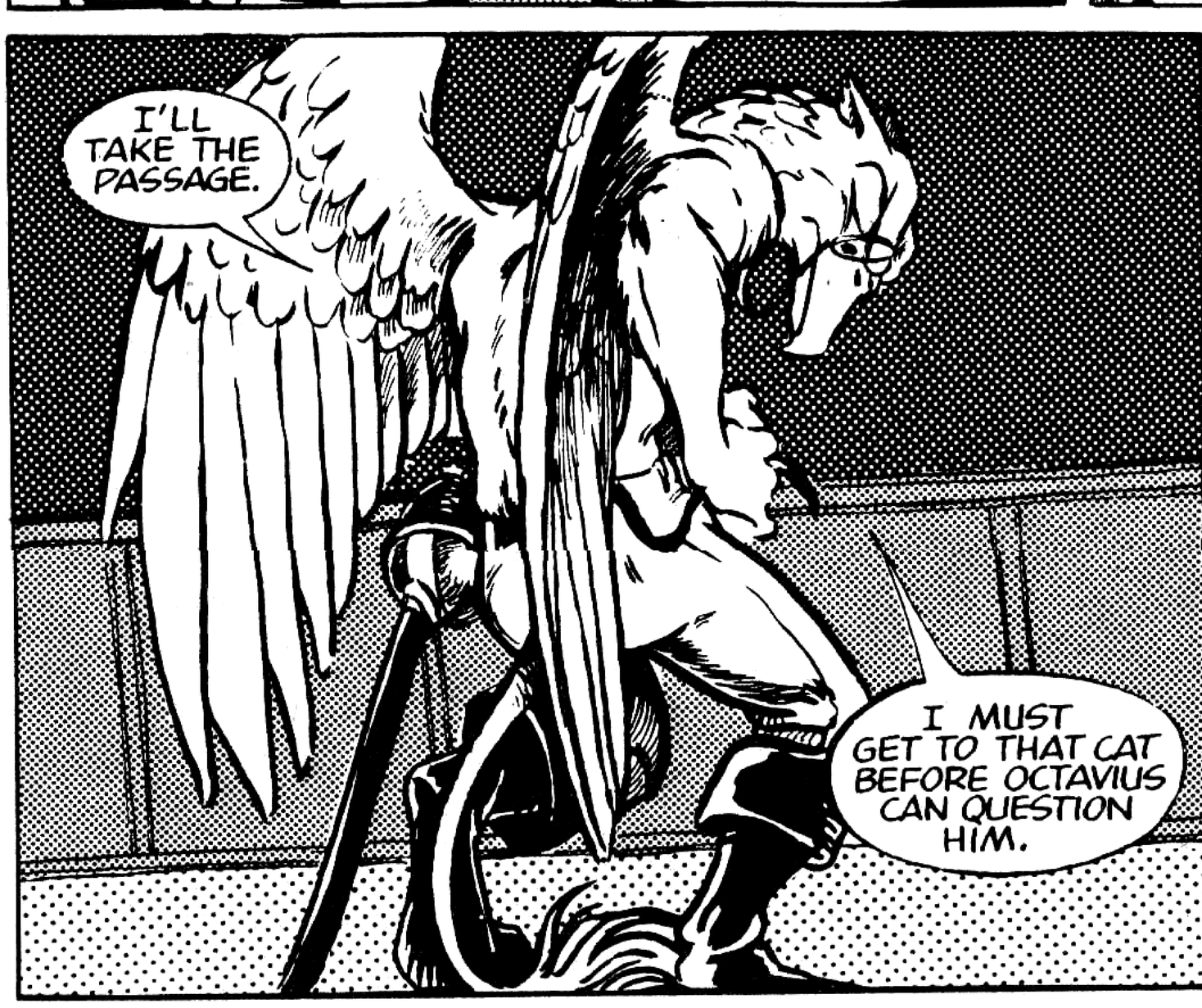
CAPTAIN PLUME! LORD OCTAVIUS SAYS YOU'RE TO REPORT HIM IMMEDIATELY!

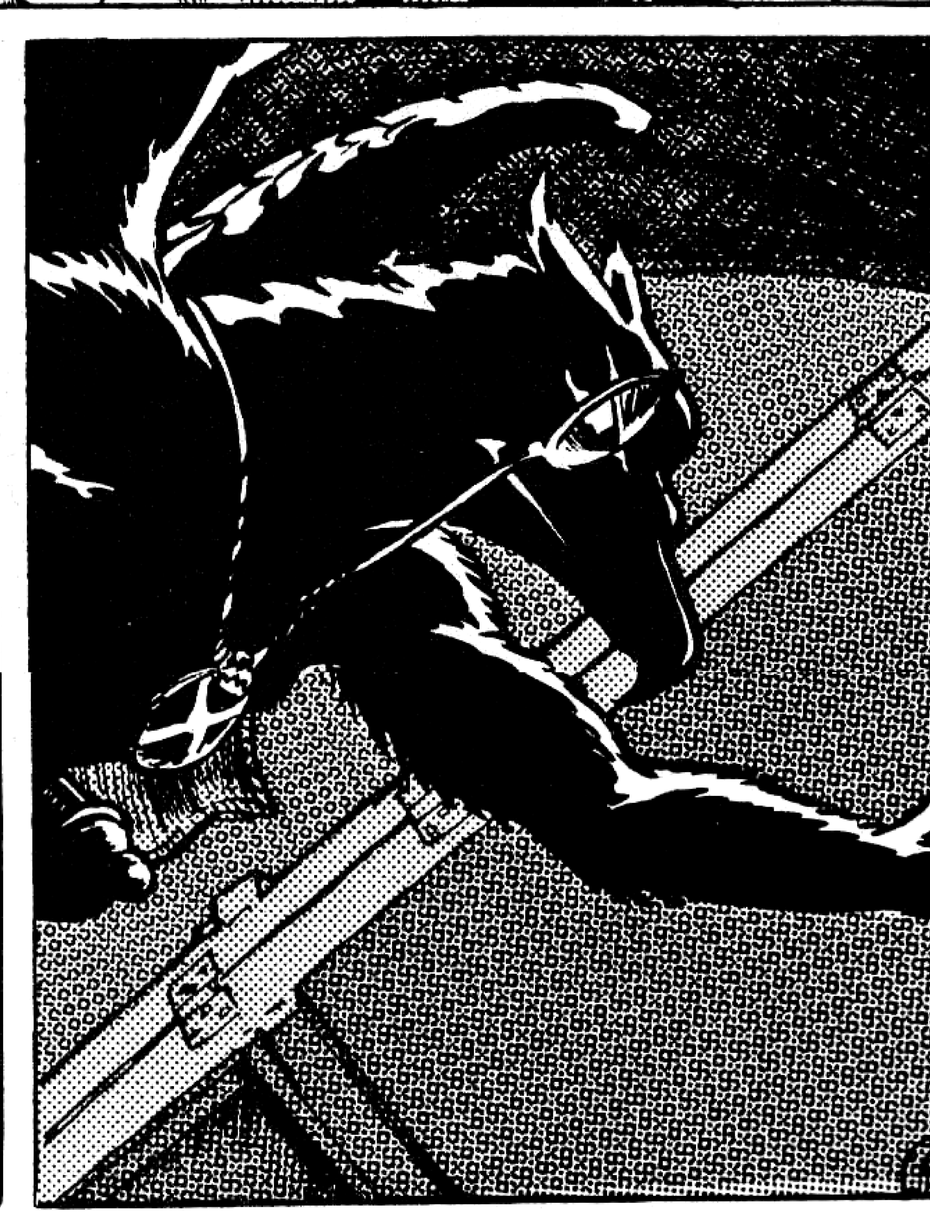
LIEUTENANT, I HAVE A HANGOVER THAT WOULD KILL A CHIMERA! THIS HAD BETTER BE GOOD...
TABBE LE FAUVE HAS BEEN SEEN IN THE PALACE.

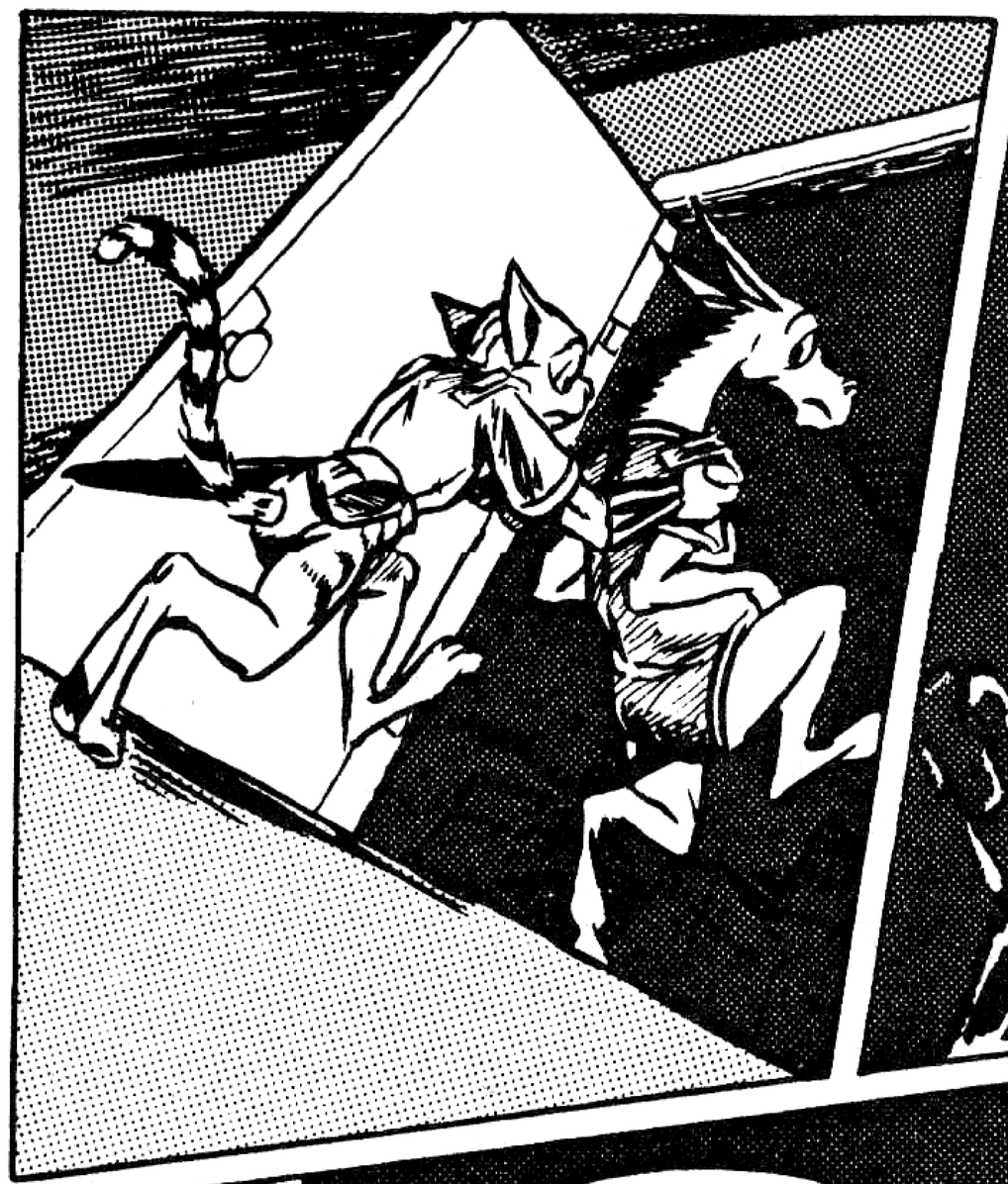

WHAT?!
WHERE...?
NEAR PRINCESS KAJIKO'S QUARTERS.


GODS! THE CAT'S TRYING TO REACH KAJIKO! HE'LL TELL HER ABOUT KINOMON!

I'LL REPORT AT ONCE! TELL LORD OCTAVIUS!
YES, SIR!


I'LL TAKE THE PASSAGE.
I MUST GET TO THAT CAT BEFORE OCTAVIUS CAN QUESTION HIM.

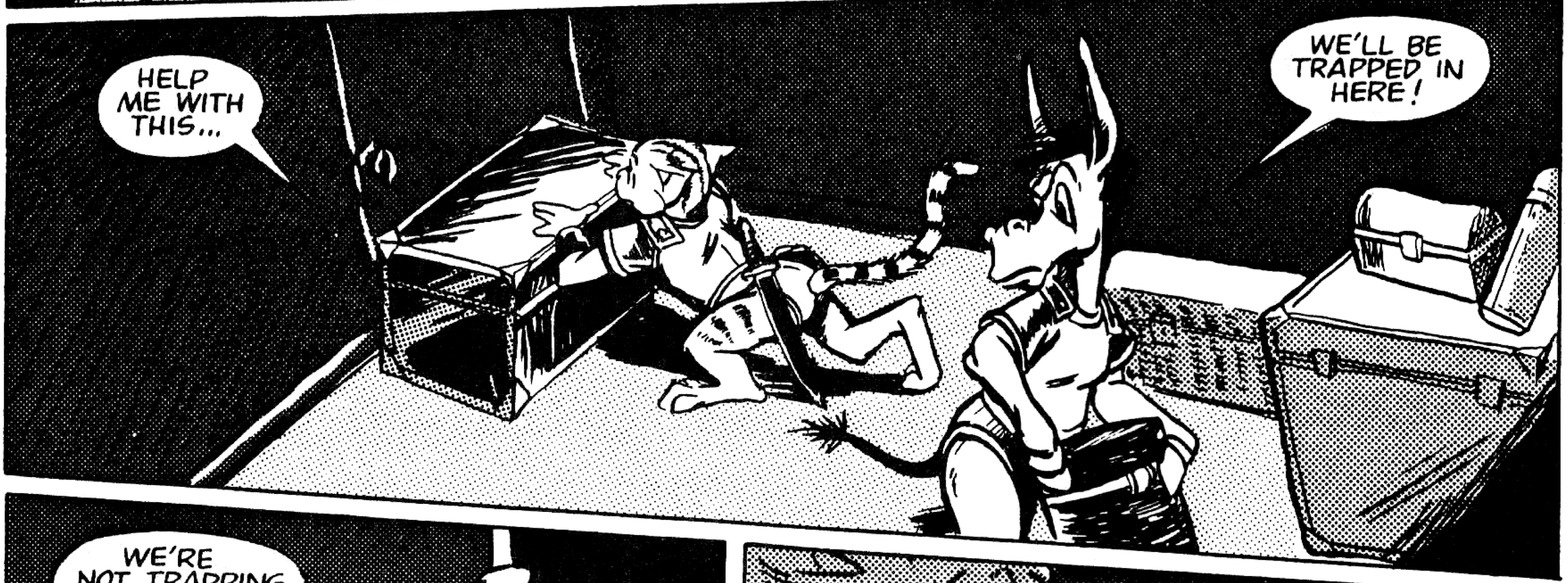




GREAT IDEA, LE FAUVE! LET'S BREAK INTO THE PALACE...

NEVERMIND WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'VE COME HERE TO STEAL!

QUIET! SOMEONE WILL HEAR YOU!
BESIDES, I DIDN'T KNOW KAJIKO WAS A SORCERESS.
IT WOULDN'T HAVE STOPPED YOU EVEN IF YOU DID. YOU'RE FUNNY THAT WAY...


HELP ME WITH THIS...
WE'LL BE TRAPPED IN HERE!

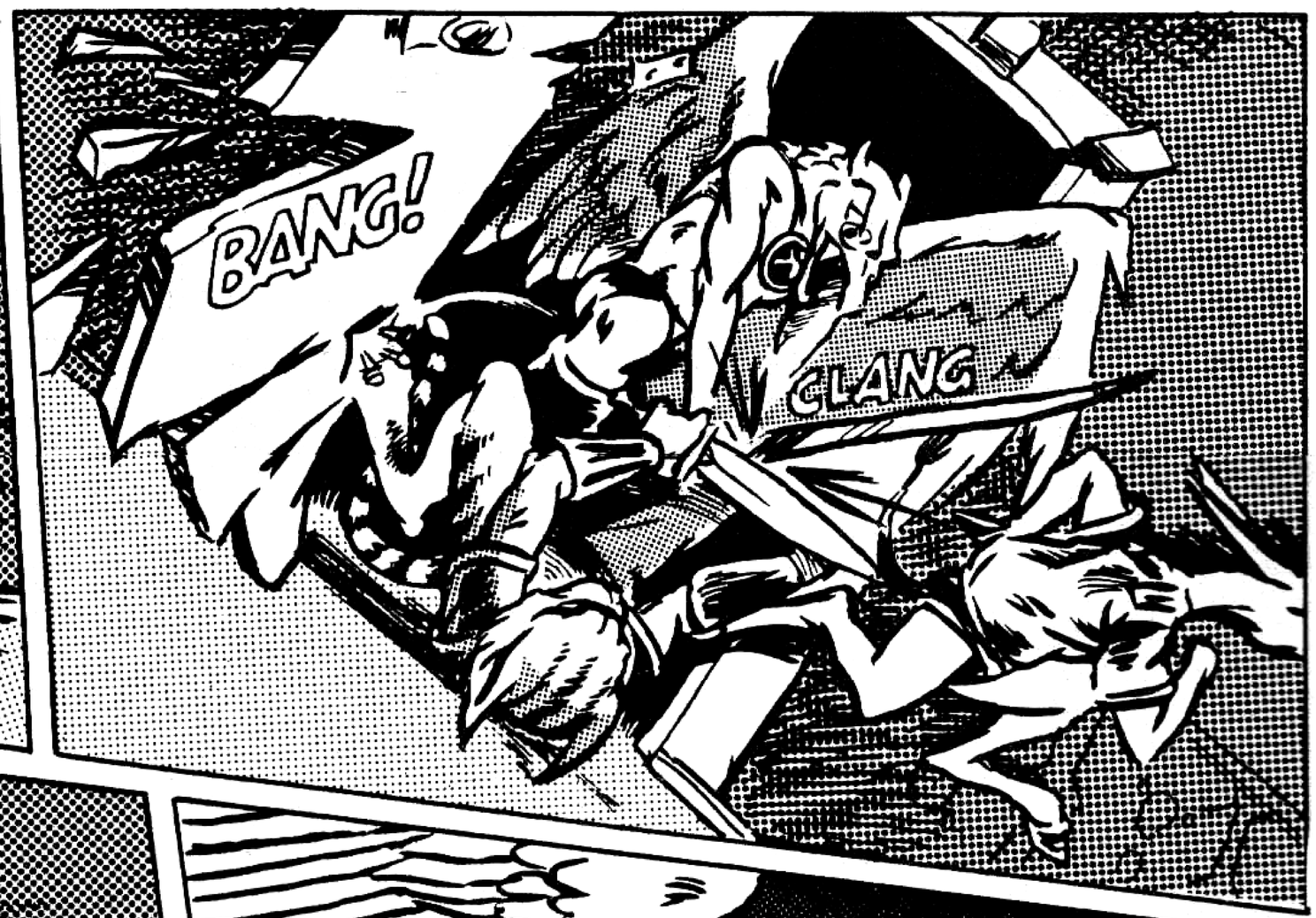
WE'RE NOT TRAPPING OURSELVES...
WE'RE BUYING TIME. THERE!

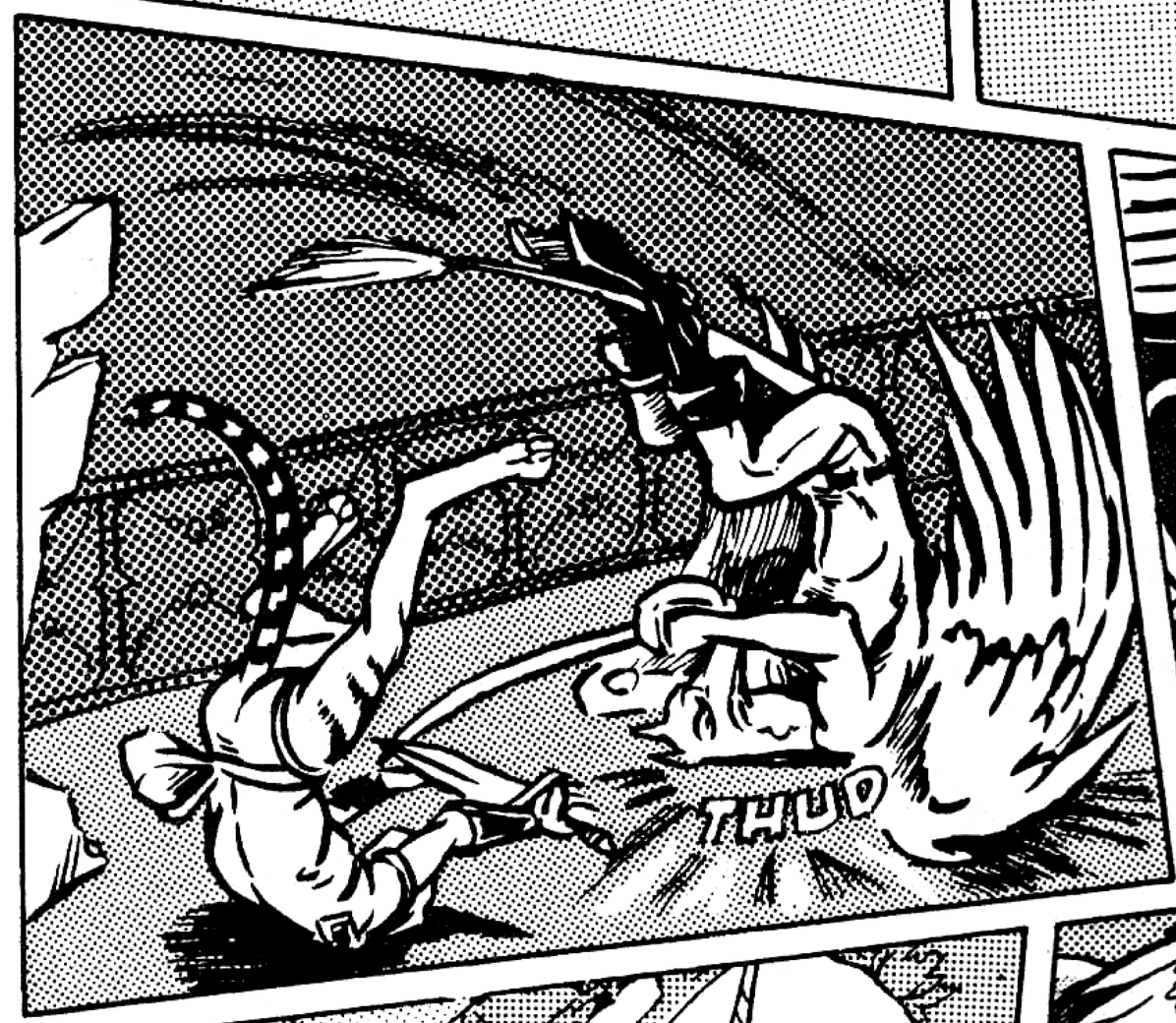
MY, MY. HOW TERRIBLY CONVENIENT...
!

AAARRAAGH!
SMASH!

KINO-CHAN! YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT! I COULD HAVE DRIVEN THEM AWAY.
THEY DID ME INJURY! IT WAS MY RIGHT!
YOU'VE REOPENED YOUR WOUNDS! AND YOU'RE STILL EXHAUSTED FROM OUR LOVE-FLIGHT. YOU SHOULD REST!
YOU SHOULDN'T FUSS SO, FIREPETAL-CHAN. I'M A WARRIOR, NOT A HATCHLING.
YOU'RE A WARRIOR WHO HASN'T SEEN HIS FIRST CENTURY. AS THE OLDER AND WISER OF THE TWO OF US, I COUNSEL YOU: REST.
YES, WIFE. YOU SHOULD GO BACK TO THE PALACE BEFORE YOU ARE MISSED. I WILL BE FINE. I WILL TAKE SHELTER IN THE TREES WHERE I CAN WATCH AND REMAIN UNSEEN.

BANG
OOF
THUD


BANG!
CLANG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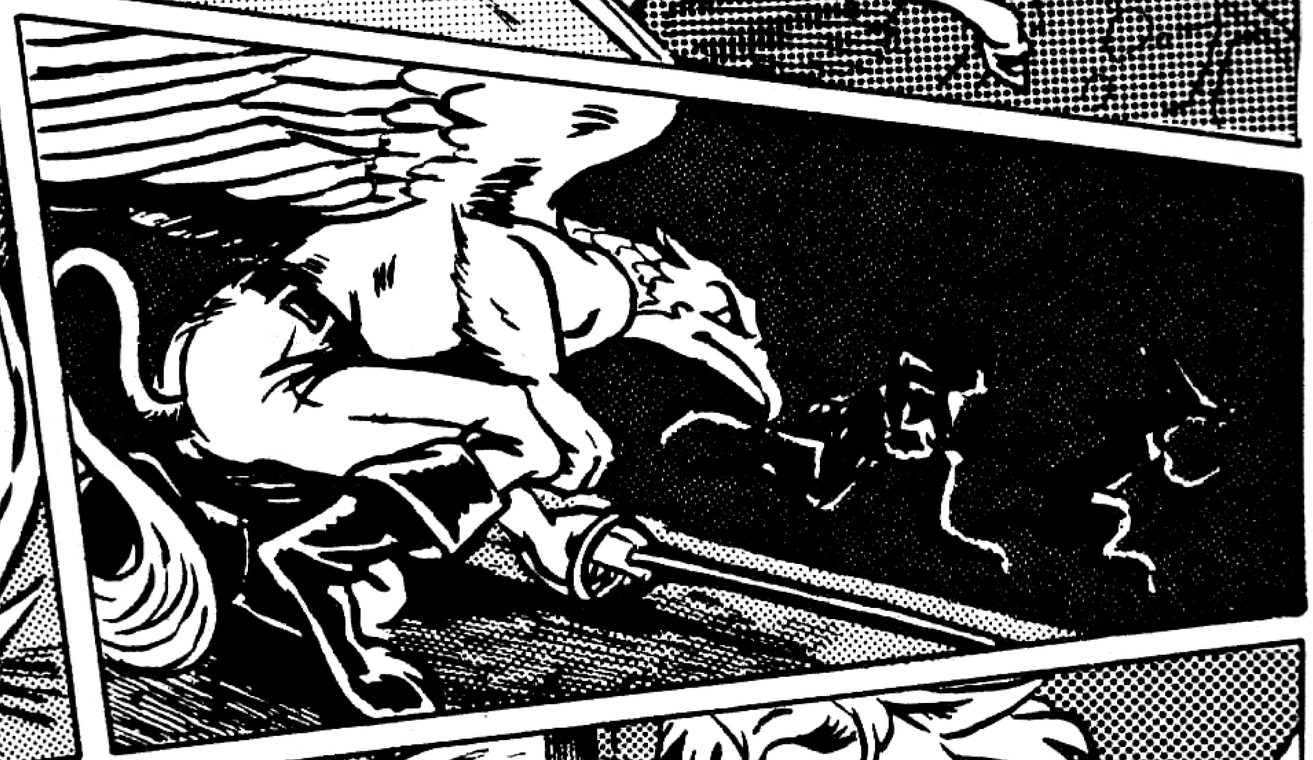
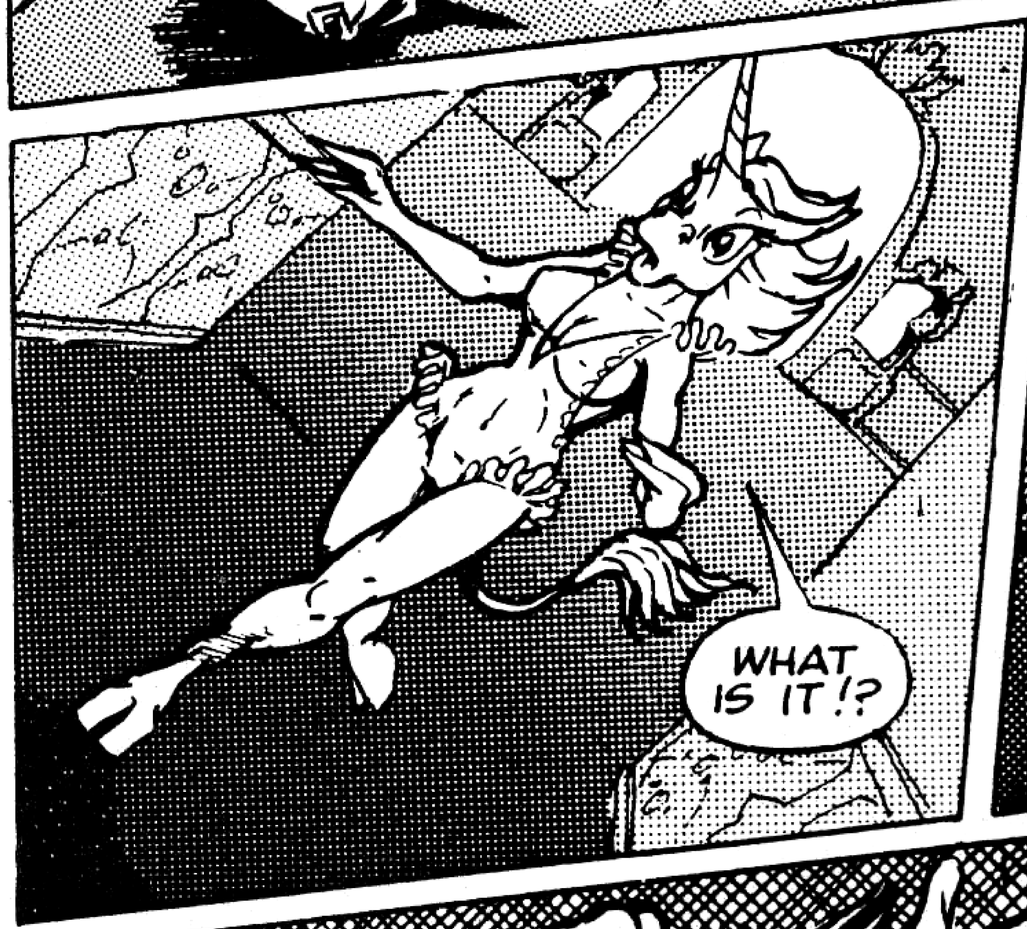
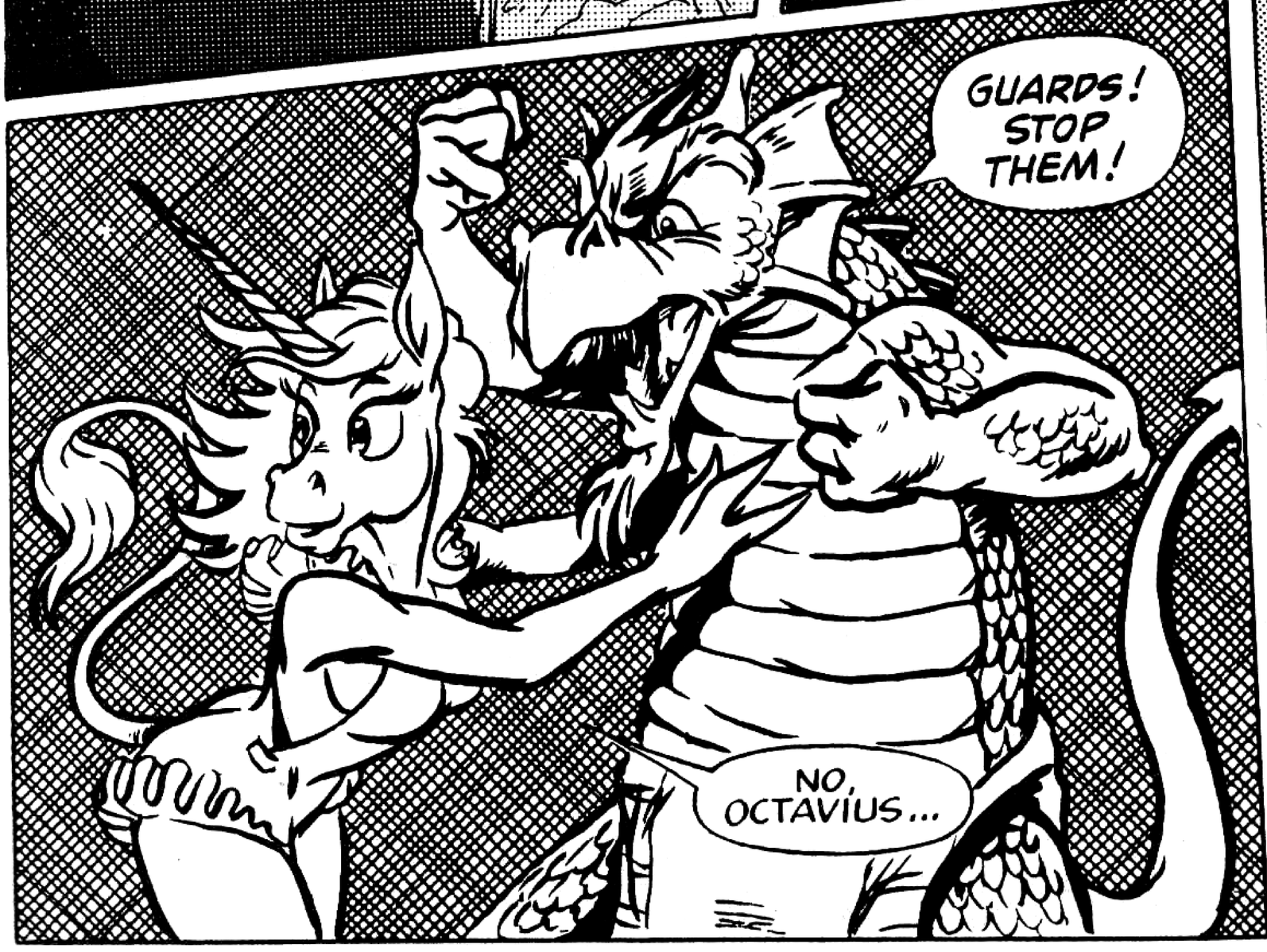
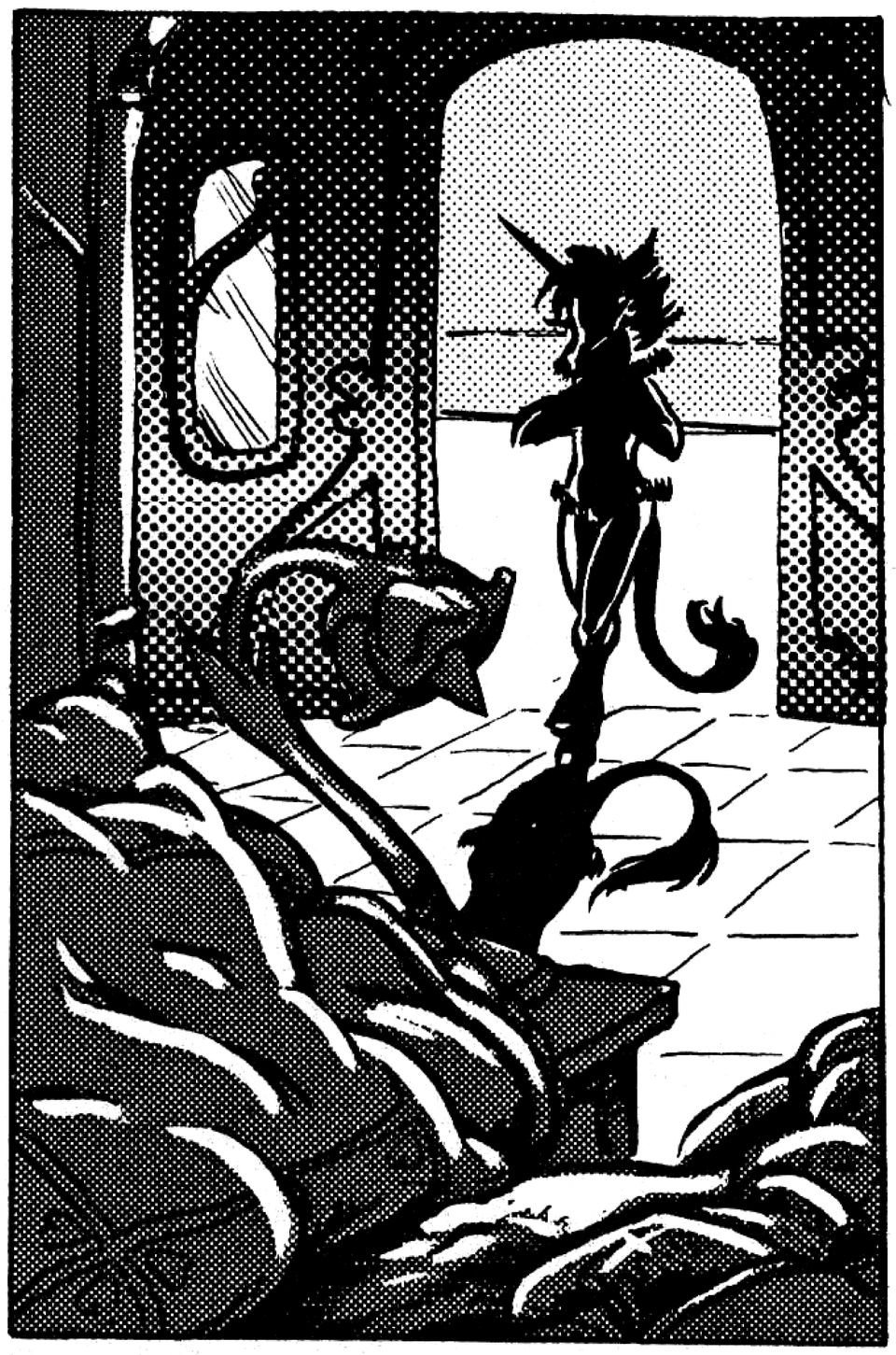


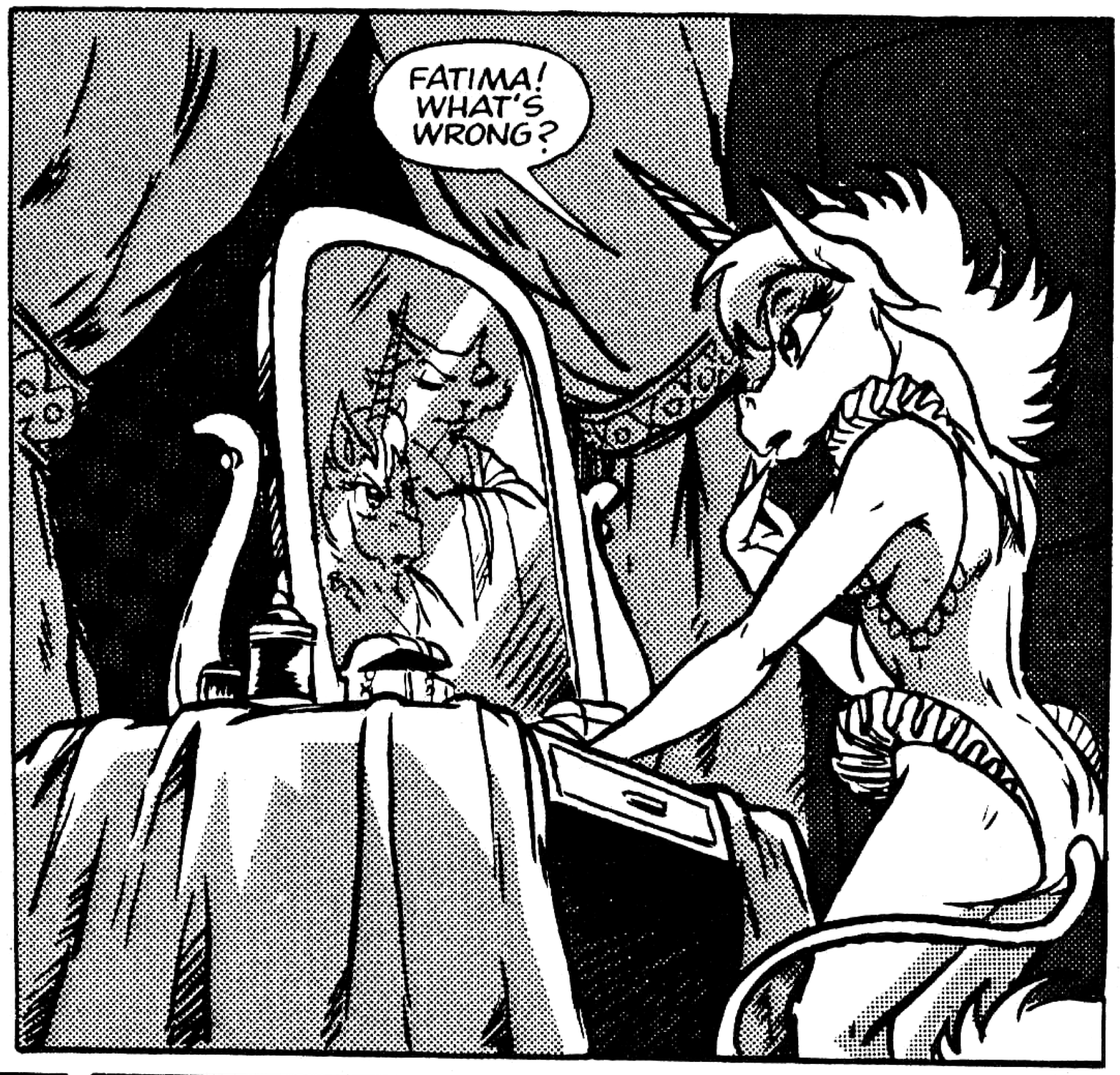

WHAT IS IT!?

TABBE! AND REGINALD...

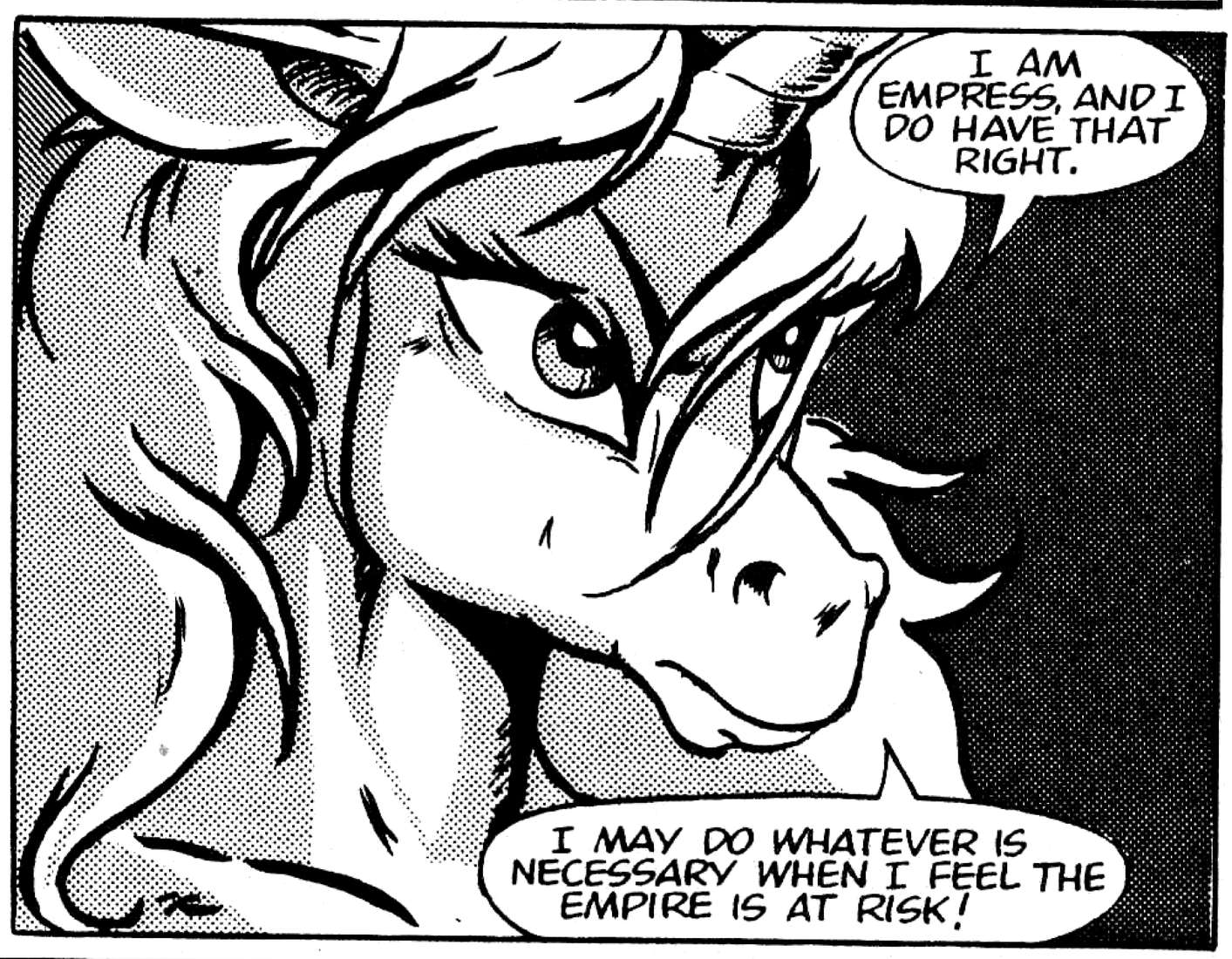

GUARDS! STOP THEM!
NO, OCTAVIUS...

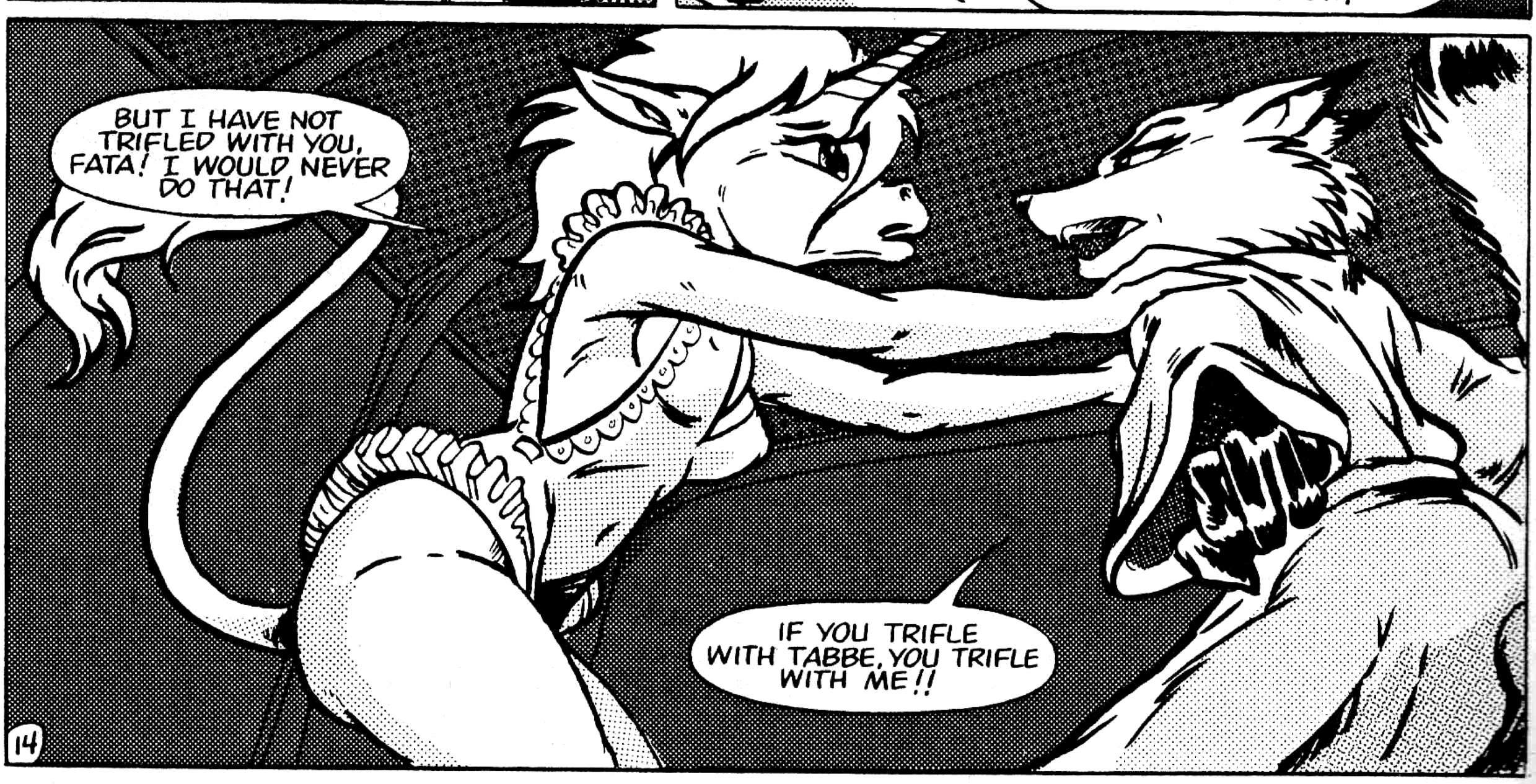
IT'S BETTER FOR MY PLANS IF THEY'RE ALLOWED TO ESCAPE...




FATIMA! WHAT'S WRONG?

HOW DARE YOU?
BECAUSE YOU ARE EMPRESS, DO YOU THINK YOU CAN TRIFLE WITH PEOPLE'S LIVES?

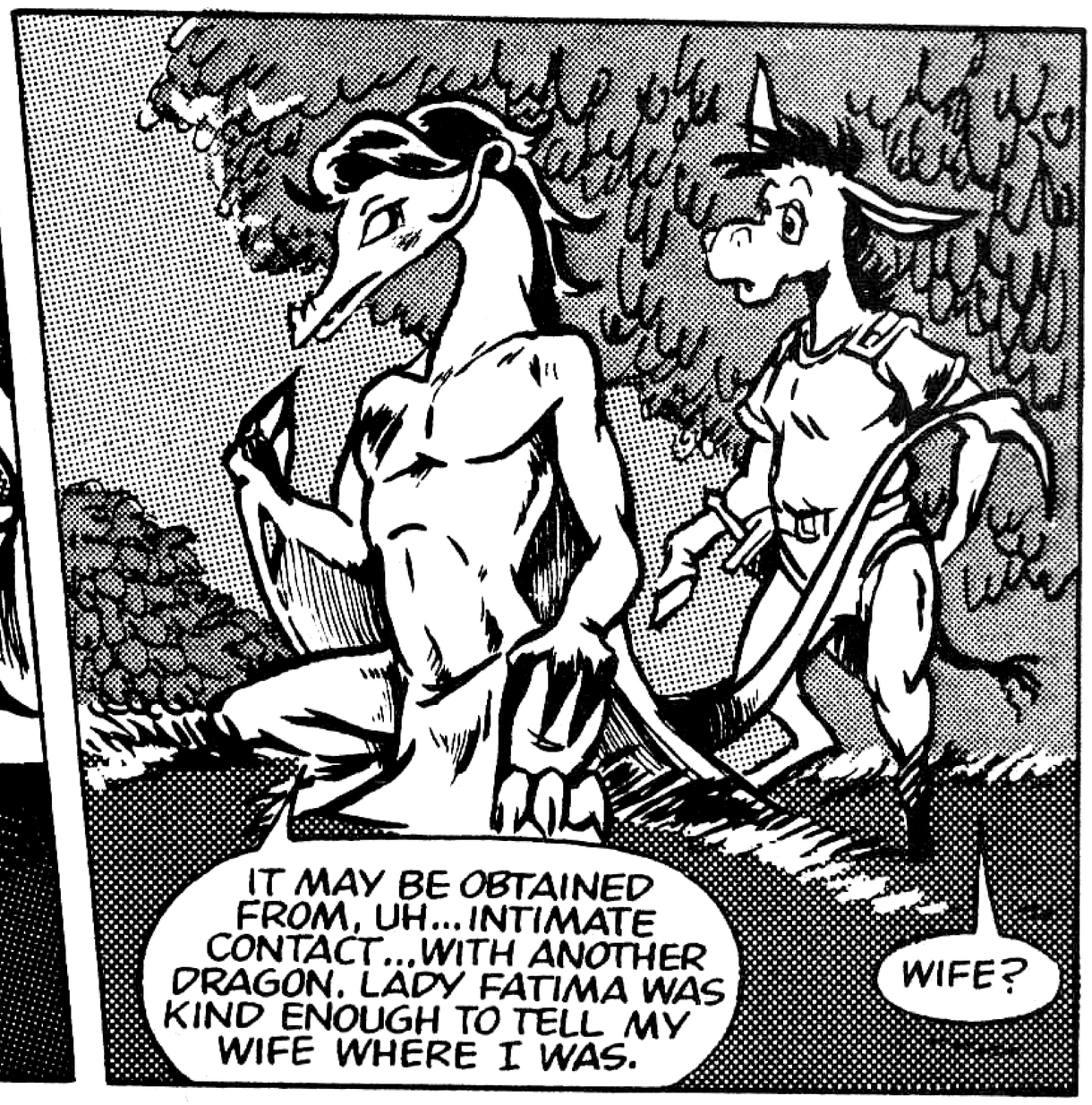

I AM EMPRESS, AND I DO HAVE THAT RIGHT.
I MAY DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY WHEN I FEEL THE EMPIRE IS AT RISK!


BUT I HAVE NOT TRIFLED WITH YOU, FATA! I WOULD NEVER DO THAT!
IF YOU TRIFLE WITH TABBE, YOU TRIFLE WITH ME!!

AH, YES... OUR DARING THIEF...
WHEN I FIRST SAW TABBE LE FAUVE, I WAS ATTRACTED BY HIS AUDACITY... JUST AS YOU WERE... THEN I REALIZED REGINALD'S JEALOUSY OF TABBE MIGHT CAUSE HIM TO DISOBEY AN IMPERIAL ORDER AND I COULD NOT HAVE THAT.
I USED TABBE TO TRY TO FORCE REGINALD TO OBEY. INSTEAD, REGINALD HAS GROWN EVEN MORE DISOBEDIENT. NOW I CANNOT STOP THIS GAME UNTIL IT IS PLAYED OUT.
WHAT IF REGINALD KILLS TABBE?
YOU SHOULD HAVE MORE FAITH IN YOUR THIEF, FATA. HE'S A CAT WITH NINE LIVES.
PLEASE DON'T CONCERN YOURSELF ABOUT ME WHERE TABBE IS CONCERNED. I WILL DO NOTHING MORE NOW THAT I SEE YOUR INTEREST IS GENUINE.
WHEN THIS GAME OF CAT AND GRIFFEN IS IS OVER, WHAT THEN? WHAT CAN TABBE HOPE TO GAIN FROM IT?
A PARDON?
FORGIVE ME, ALICIA...
I DON'T THINK A PARDON IS WHAT TABBE WANTS...

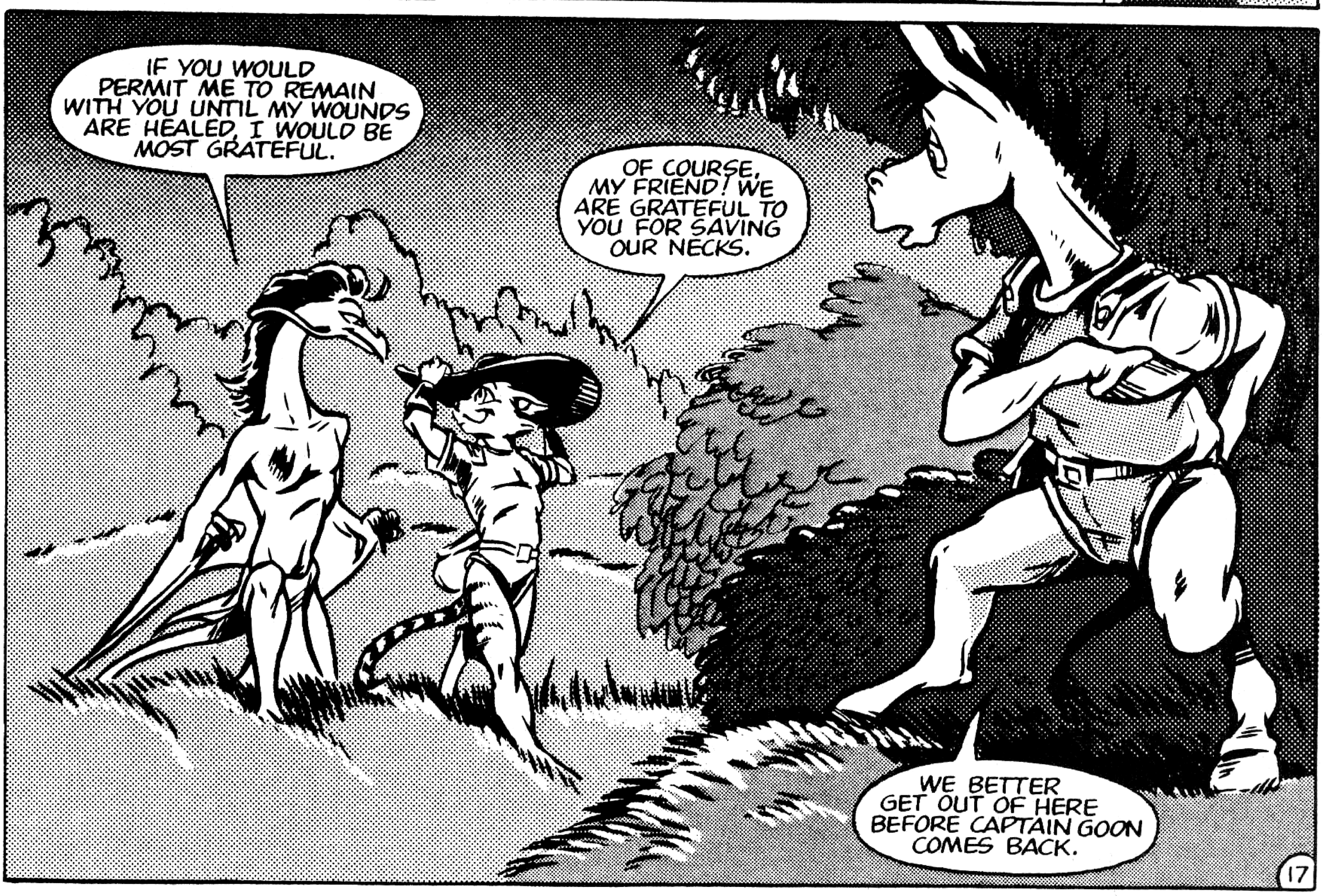
LE FAUVE!
GODS! KINOMON!
YOU GOT YOUR FIRE BACK. HOW'D YOU DO THAT?

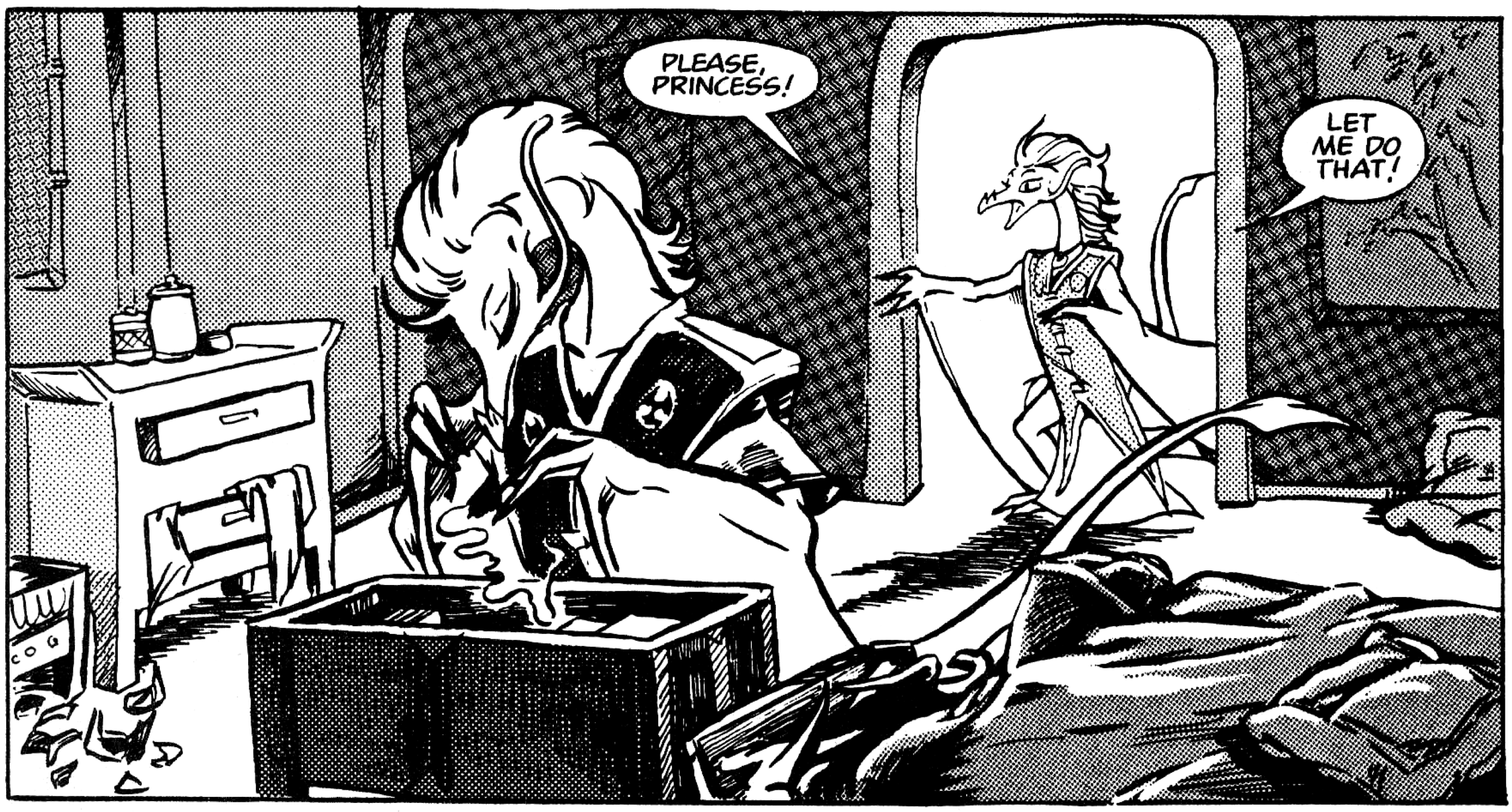
SO SORRY. I HAD FORGOTTEN. THERE IS ANOTHER WAY A DRAGON MAY RECLAIM HIS FIRE.
WHAT IS THAT?

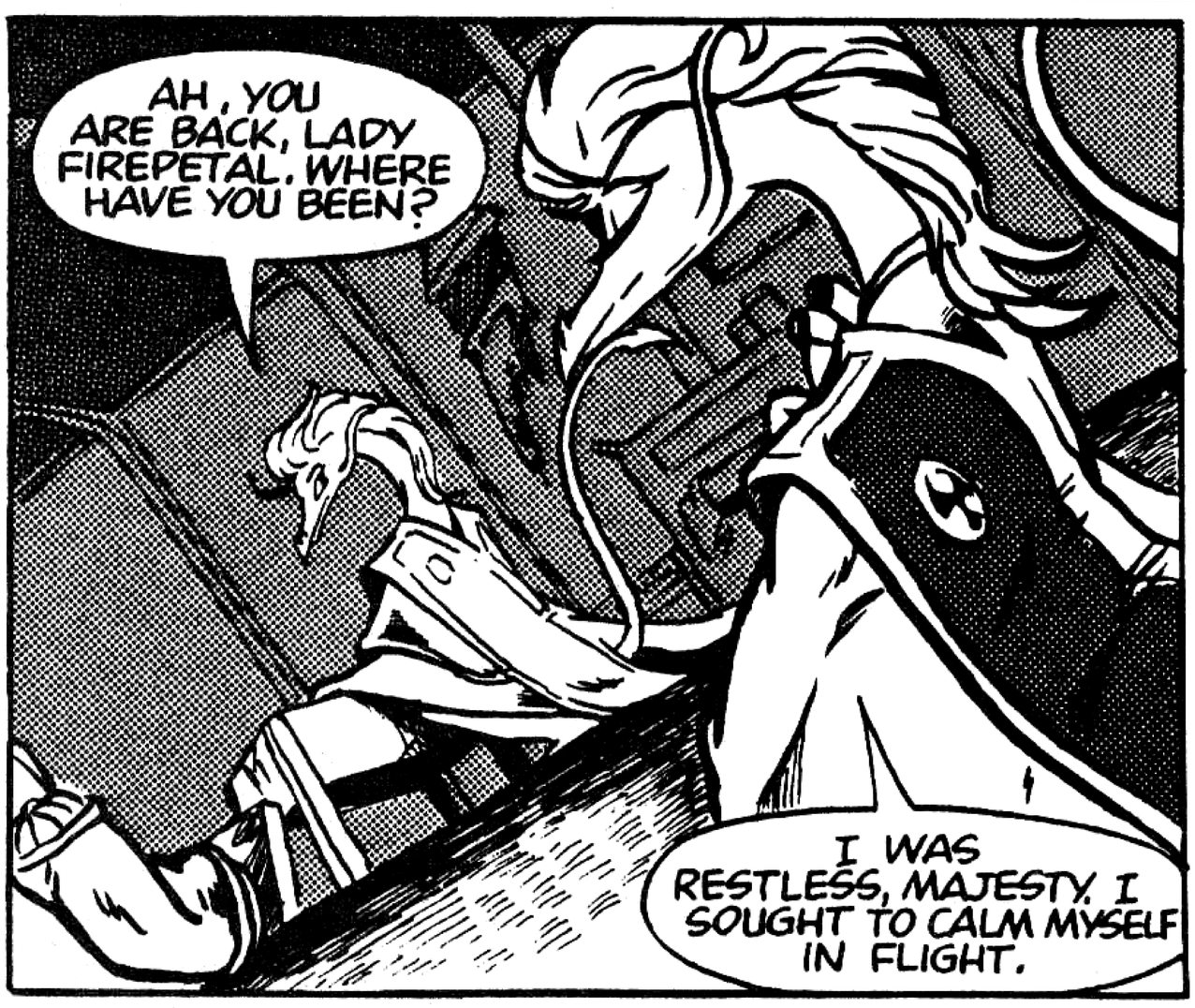

IT MAY BE OBTAINED FROM, UH... INTIMATE CONTACT... WITH ANOTHER DRAGON. LADY FATIMA WAS KIND ENOUGH TO TELL MY WIFE WHERE I WAS.
WIFE?

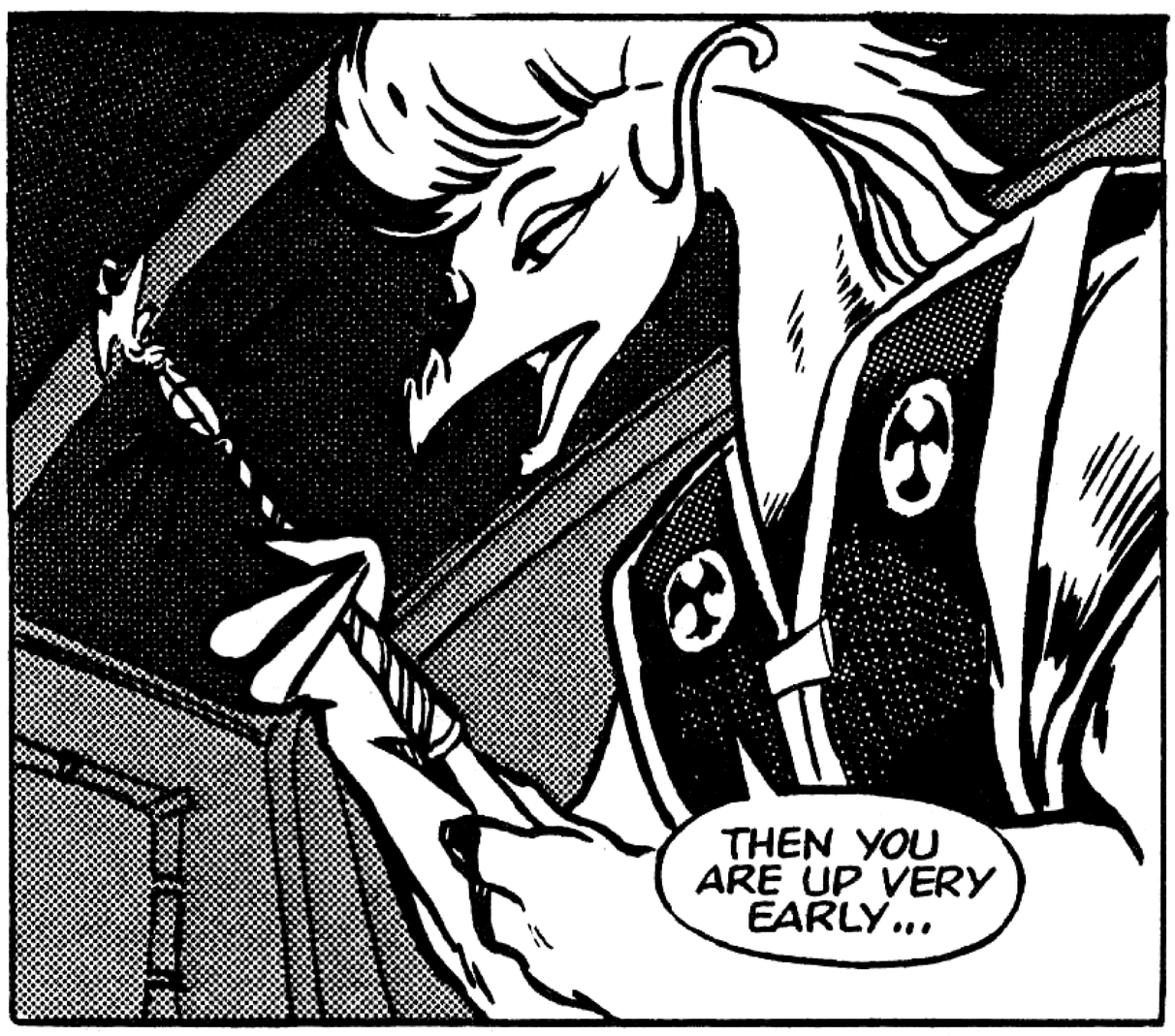
LADY FIREPETAL.

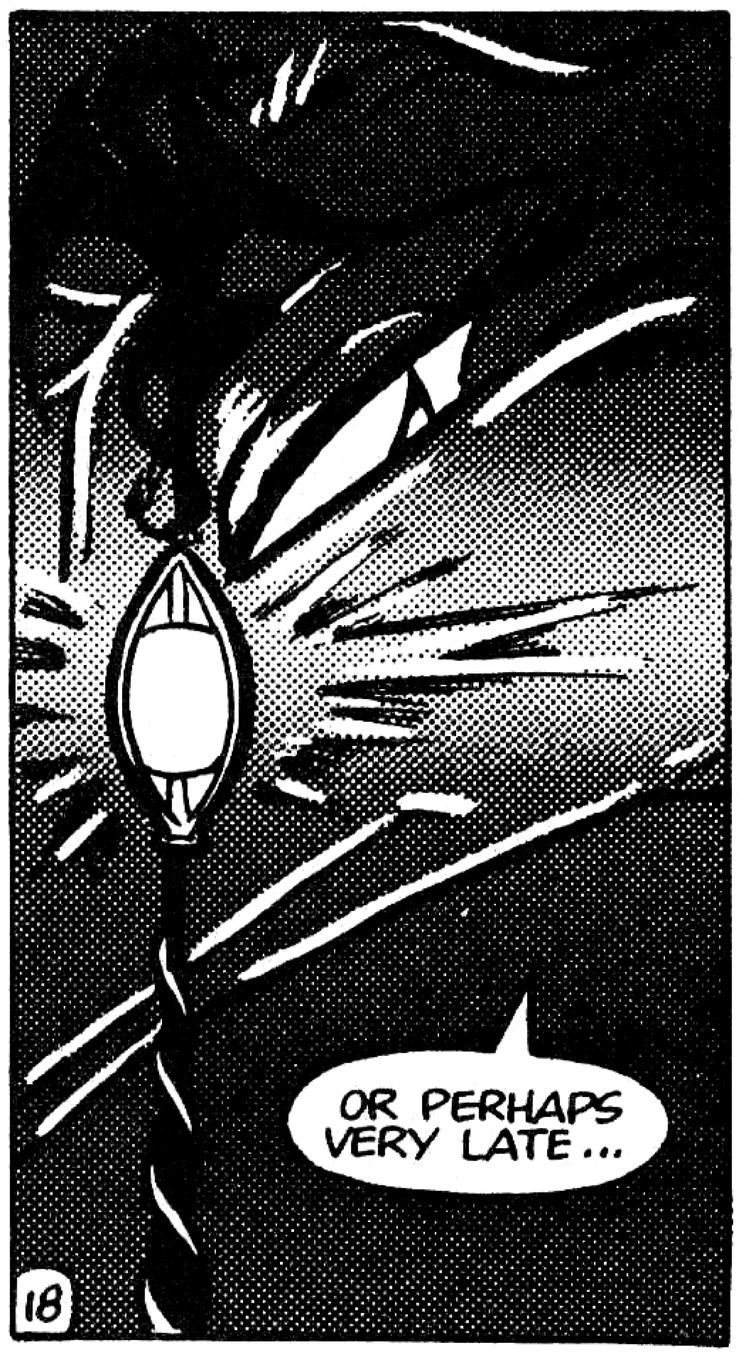
OF COURSE!
THAT MAKES PERFECT SENSE!
WHERE THIEVES FAIL, LOVE SUCCEEDS!

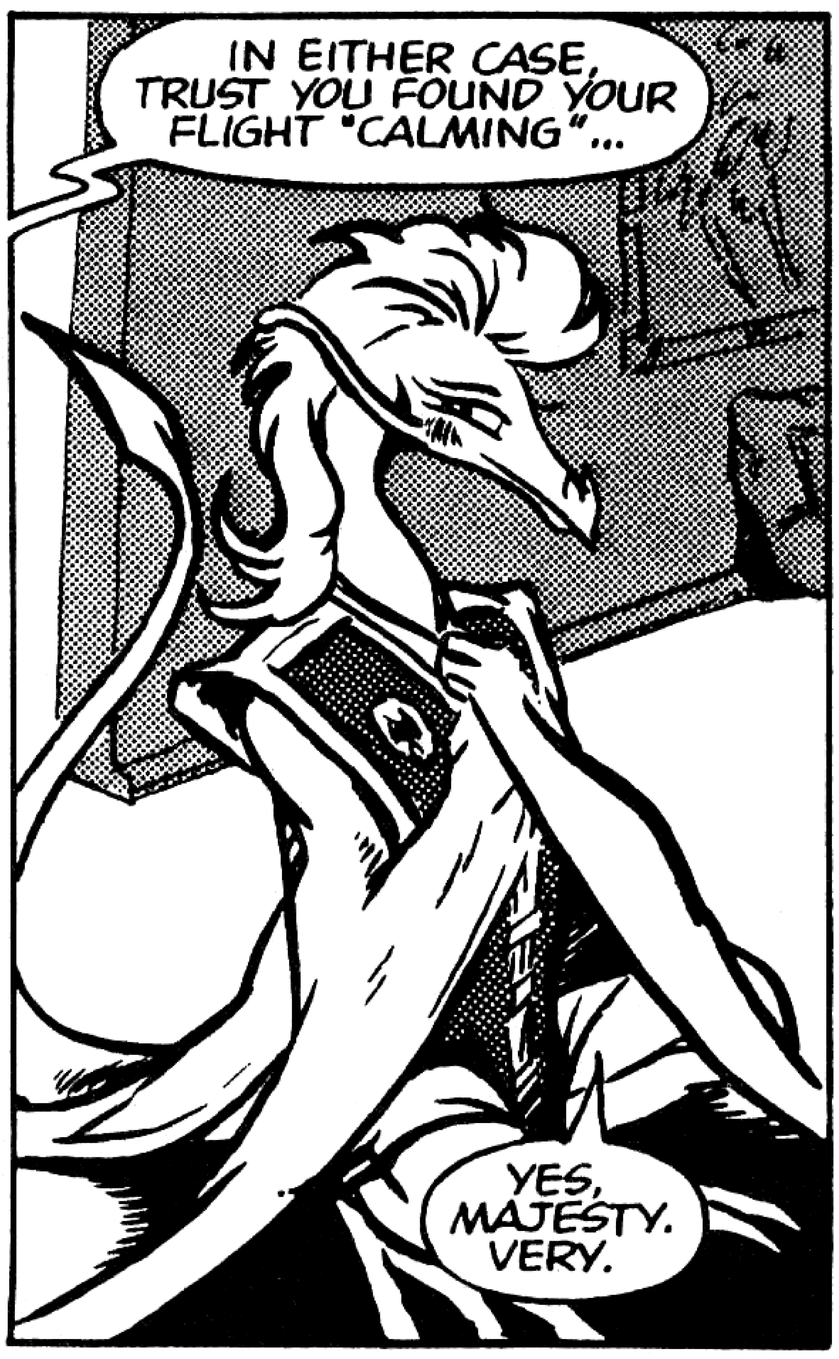

IF YOU WOULD PERMIT ME TO REMAIN WITH YOU UNTIL MY WOUNDS ARE HEALED, I WOULD BE MOST GRATEFUL.
OF COURSE, MY FRIEND! WE ARE GRATEFUL TO YOU FOR SAVING OUR NECKS.
WE BETTER GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE CAPTAIN GOON COMES BACK.


PLEASE, PRINCESS!
LET ME DO THAT!


AH, YOU ARE BACK, LADY FIREPETAL. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?
I WAS RESTLESS, MAJESTY. I SOUGHT TO CALM MYSELF IN FLIGHT.


THEN YOU ARE UP VERY EARLY...


OR PERHAPS VERY LATE...


IN EITHER CASE, TRUST YOU FOUND YOUR FLIGHT "CALMING"...
YES, MAJESTY. VERY.

IF YOU'RE SUFFICENTLY RESTED, THEN I WOULD LIKE SOME TEA.
AT ONCE, PRINCESS!

WHAT HAPPENED?! KINOMON HAS HIS FIRE BACK!
WHATEVER HAPPENED, IT SEEMS A DRAGON BODY DOESN'T HEAL AS FAST AS HIS FIRE DOES.
IF I CAN FIND A WAY TO LESSEN THE EFFECT OF HIS FIRE, KINOMON WILL FALL TO ME EASILY.
THE GRIFFEN IS RIGHT! KINO-CHAN IS TOO WEAK TO FIGHT! IF THE GRIFFEN CAN PROTECT HIMSELF FROM DRAGONFIRE, THEN MY HUSBAND WILL BE HELPLESS! I MUST DO SOMETHING!

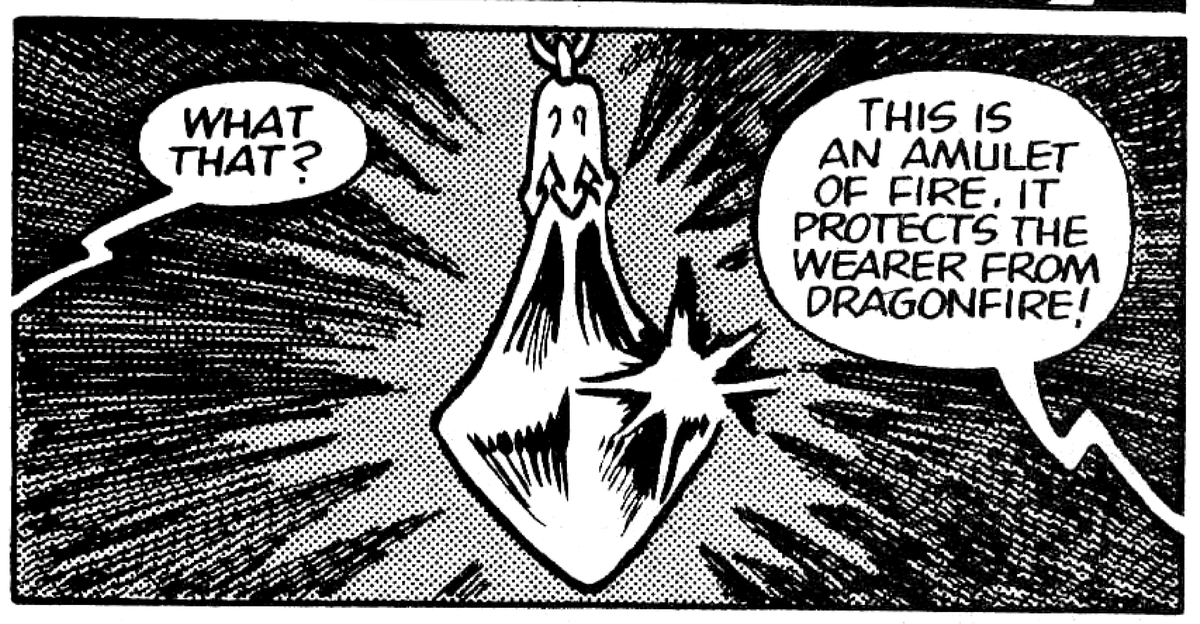
WHERE THIEVES FAIL LOVE SUCCEEDS...
WHERE HONOR FAILS, LOVE SUCCEEDS...
WHERE LOVE FAILS...
...ONLY SACRIFICE SUCCEEDS.

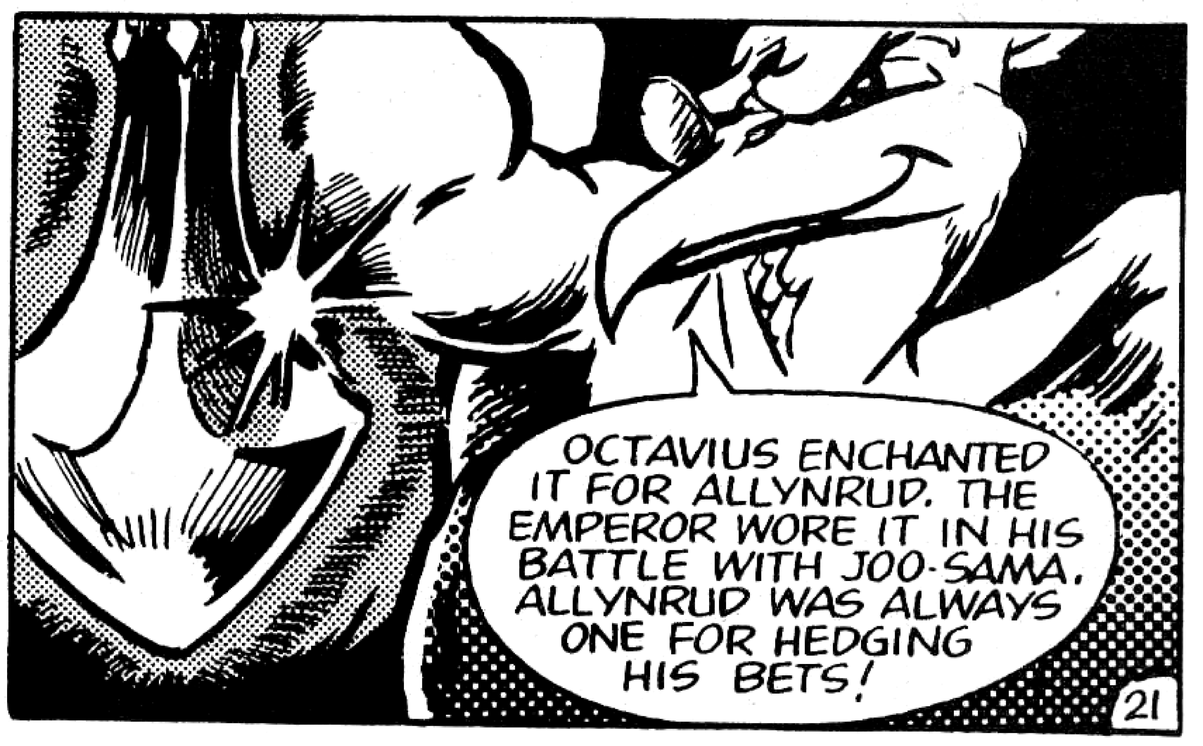
KEPTIN REGINALD! WE NOEXPECT TO SEE YOU HERE!
EVIDENTLY NOT. I TAKE IT YOU DIDN'T FIND THE DRAGON.

SNAP
WE FOUND THE DRAGON, ALL RIGHT! HE KILLED SNIPE! BURNED HIM UP LIKE THAT!

YOU NO SAY DRAGON GET HIS FIRE BACK!

I DIDN'T KNOW. IT DOESN'T MATTER.
DO YOU SEE THIS?


WHAT THAT?
THIS IS AN AMULET OF FIRE. IT PROTECTS THE WEARER FROM DRAGONFIRE!


OCTAVIUS ENCHANTED IT FOR ALLYNRUD. THE EMPEROR WORE IT IN HIS BATTLE WITH JOO-SAMA. ALLYNRUD WAS ALWAYS ONE FOR HEDGING HIS BETS!

KEPTIN!
FFLAP
WHAT DRAGON LEAVE?
IT'S A CHALLENGE PENNED IN BLOOD. COMMANDER KINOMON FEELS HIS HONOR HAS BEEN INJURED... HE WANTS A FORMAL DUEL...
WHAT A NAIVE WRETCH YOU ARE, KINOMON!
YOU FIGHT DRAGON?
OF COURSE! THIS IS PERFECT! BE READY WITH YOUR WEAPONS WHEN I BRING THE DRAGON DOWN.

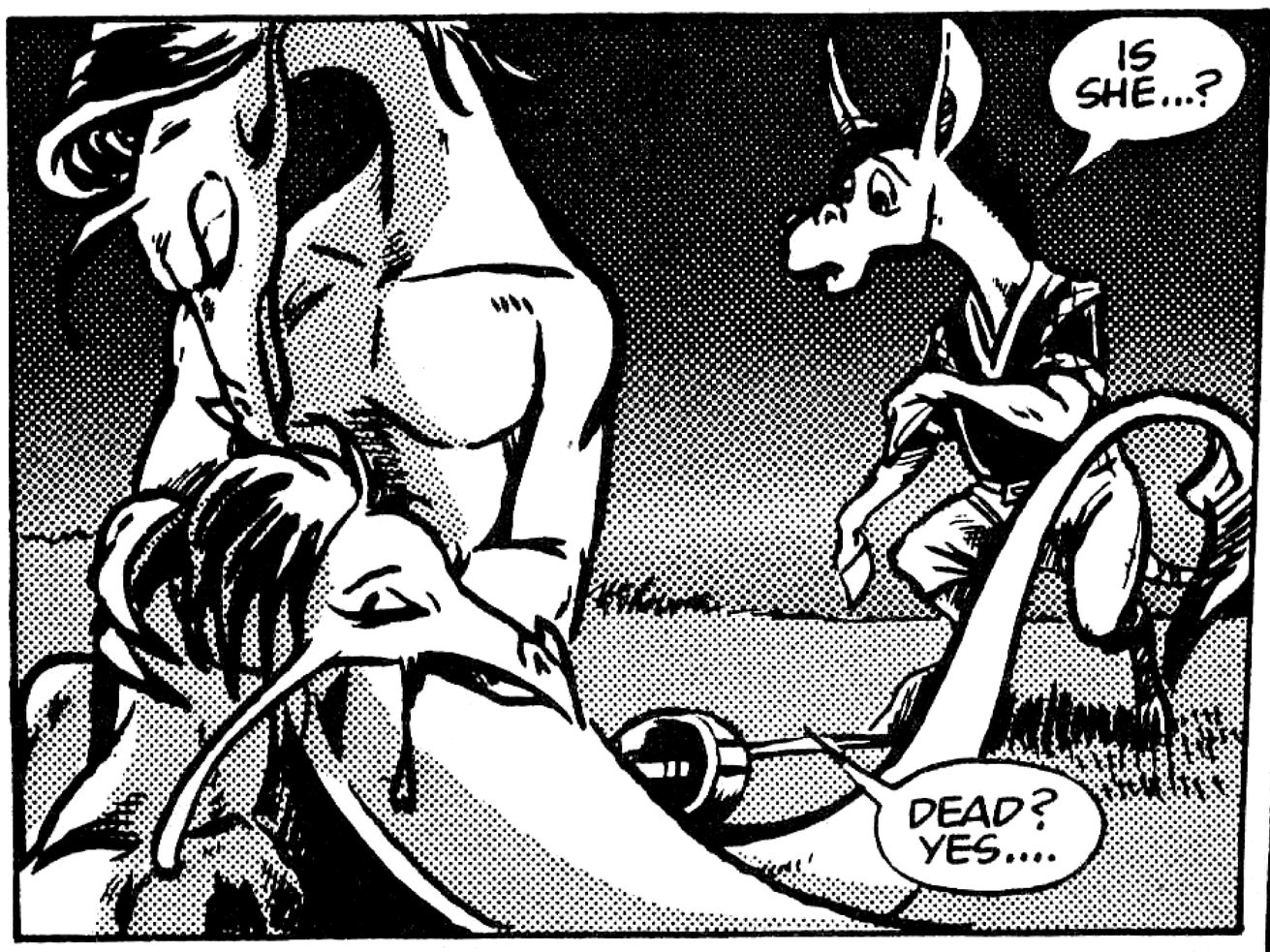
UUUGHH!
WAIT! SOMETHING'S WRONG!
OH MY GODS... THIS IS THE WRONG DRAGON... THIS IS THE FEMALE FIREPETAL...
HONOR IS SERVED, TRAITOR... YOU HAVE FAILED...
SHE'S RIGHT... I CAN'T RETURN TO THE PALACE NOW... I'M RUINED...
THEY COME FROM PALACE SOON! COME AWAY KEPTIN... YOU COME WITH US...

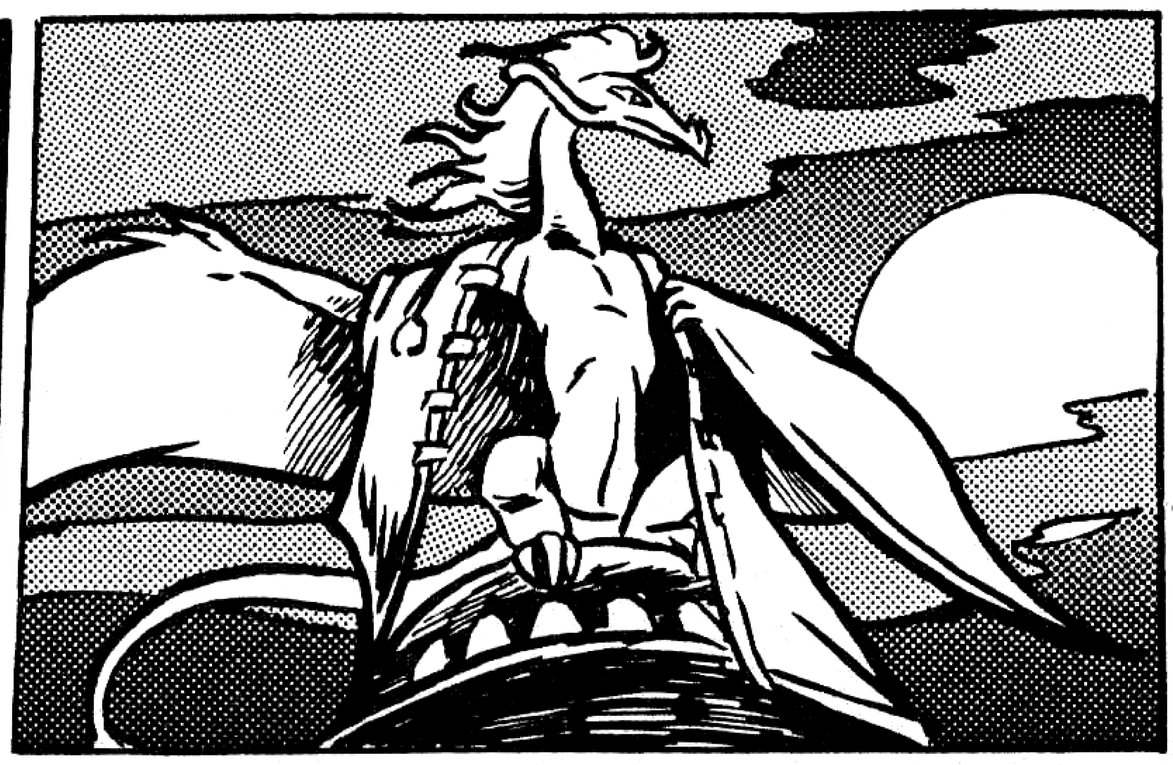
FIREPETAL!

WHAT'S THE MATTER NOW?
SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED TO FIREPETAL! I MUST GO TO HER!

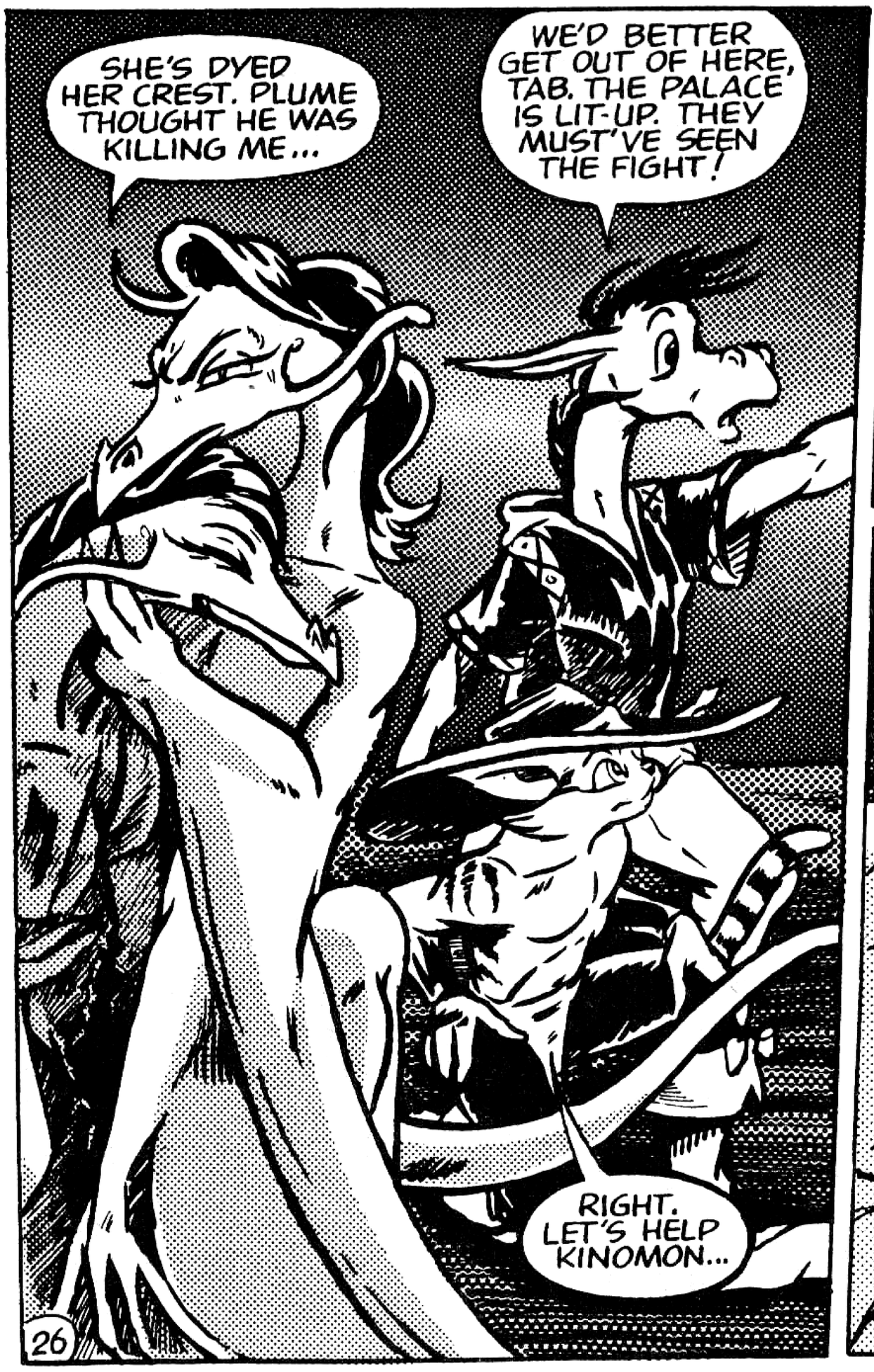
HOW DO YOU KNOW?
THERE IS A LINK BETWEEN MATED DRAGONS. WHEN ONE IS INJURED, THE OTHER KNOWS!

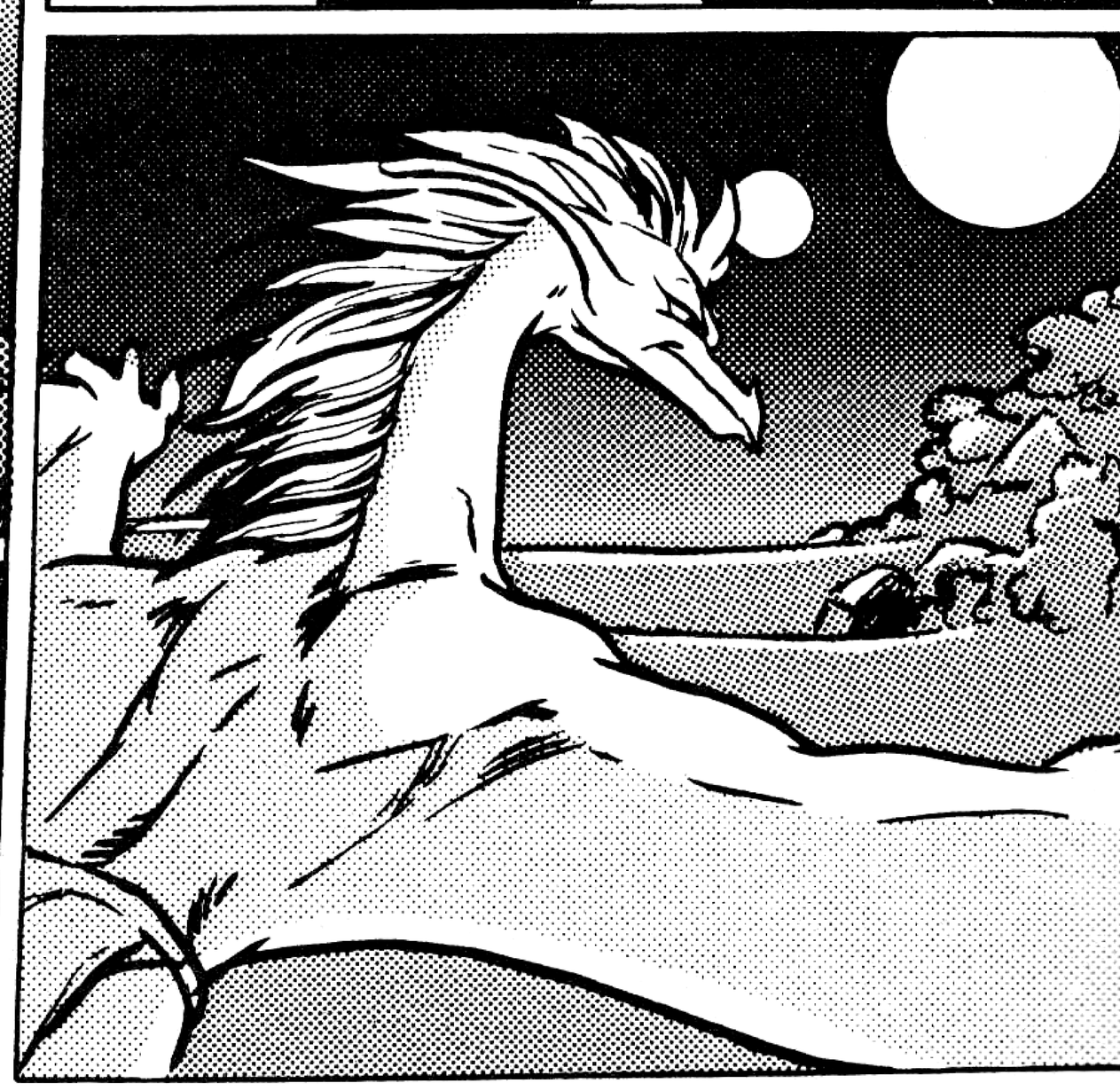
QUICKLY, PLEASE! THERE IS NO TIME!

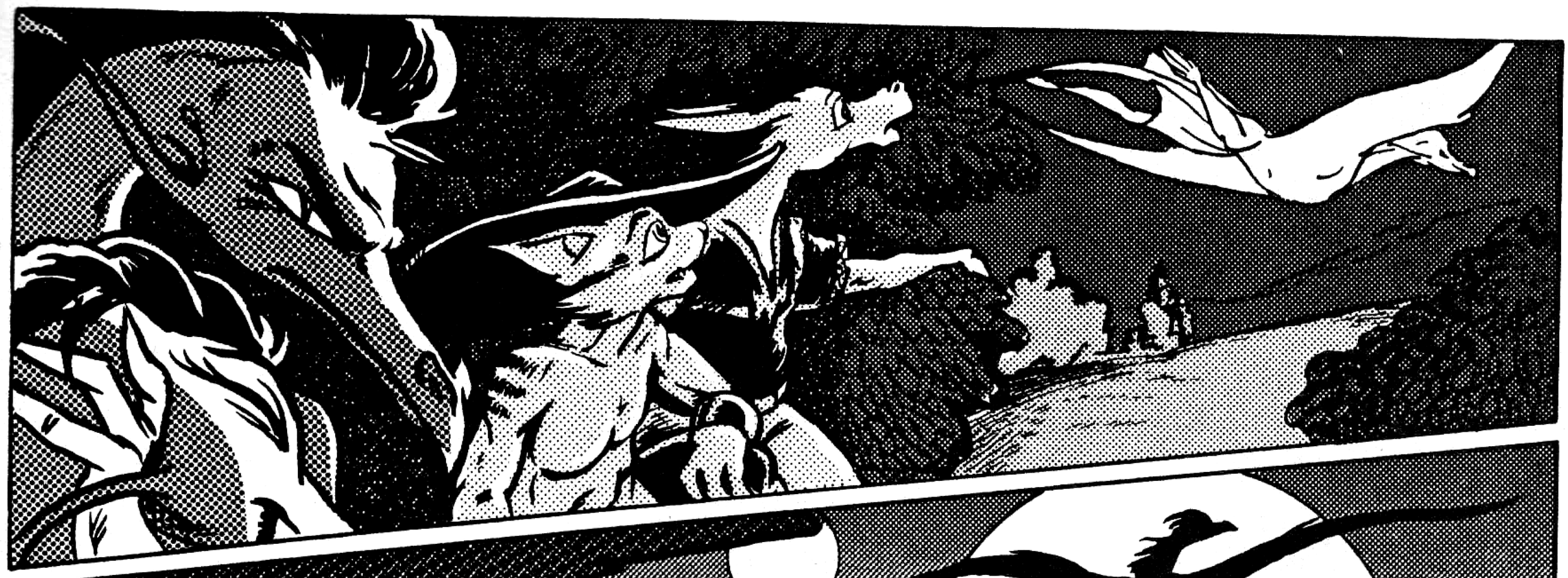

IS SHE...?
DEAD? YES....

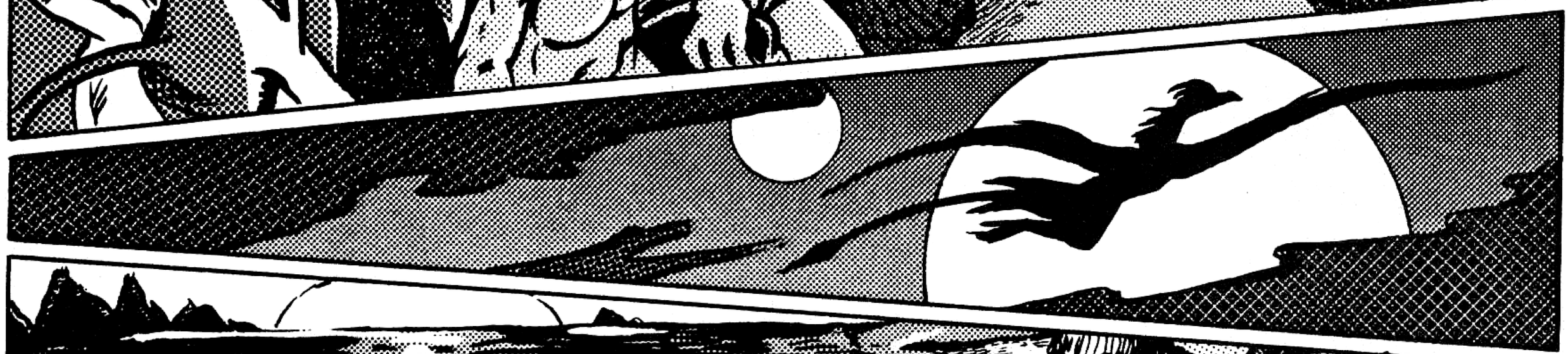


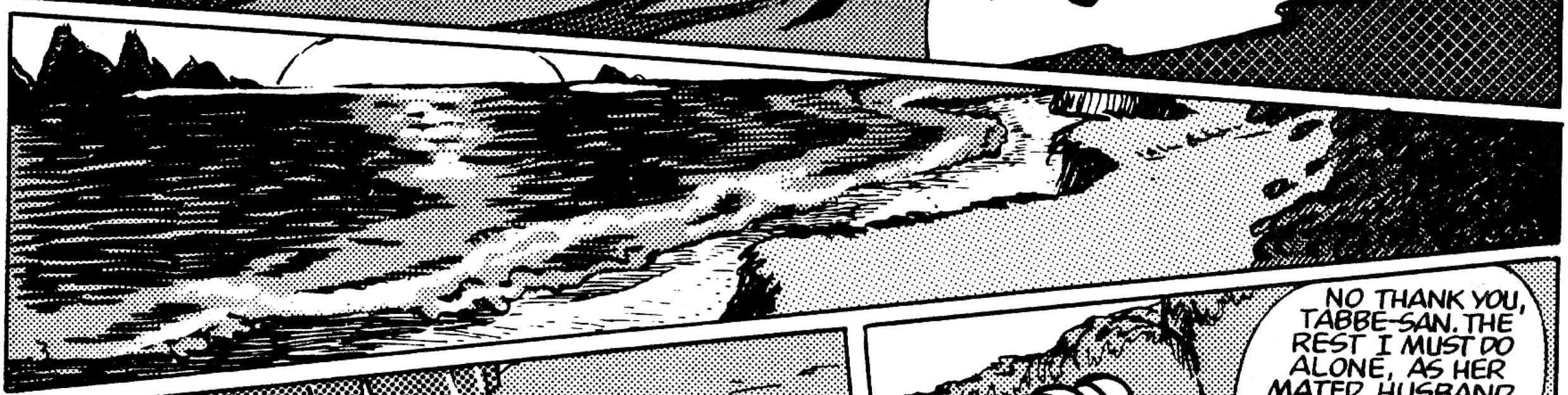
THIS SABER BELONGS TO REGINALD PLUME.

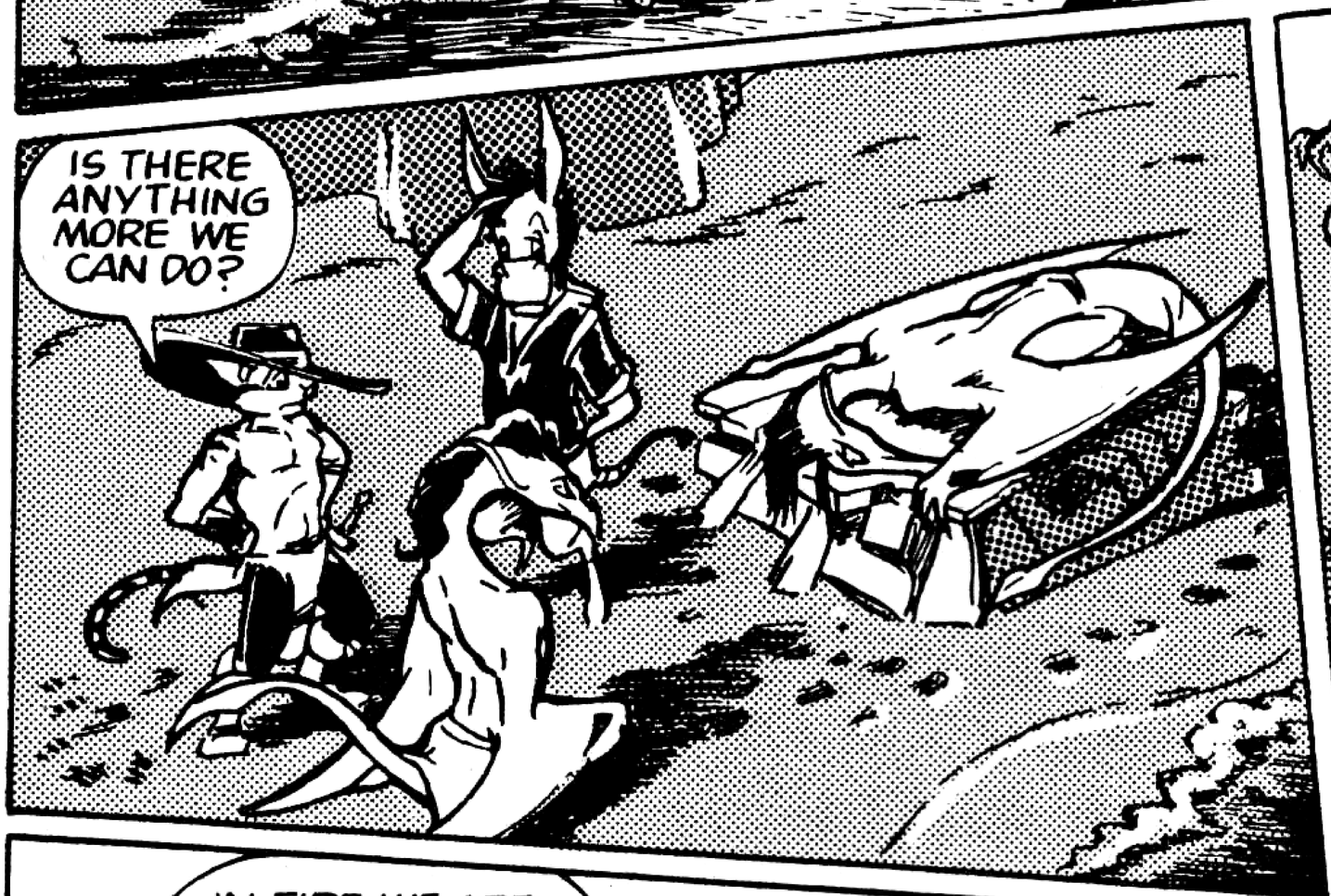

SHE'S DYED HER CREST. PLUME THOUGHT HE WAS KILLING ME...
WE'D BETTER GET OUT OF HERE, TAB. THE PALACE IS LIT-UP. THEY MUST'VE SEEN THE FIGHT!
RIGHT. LET'S HELP KINOMON...







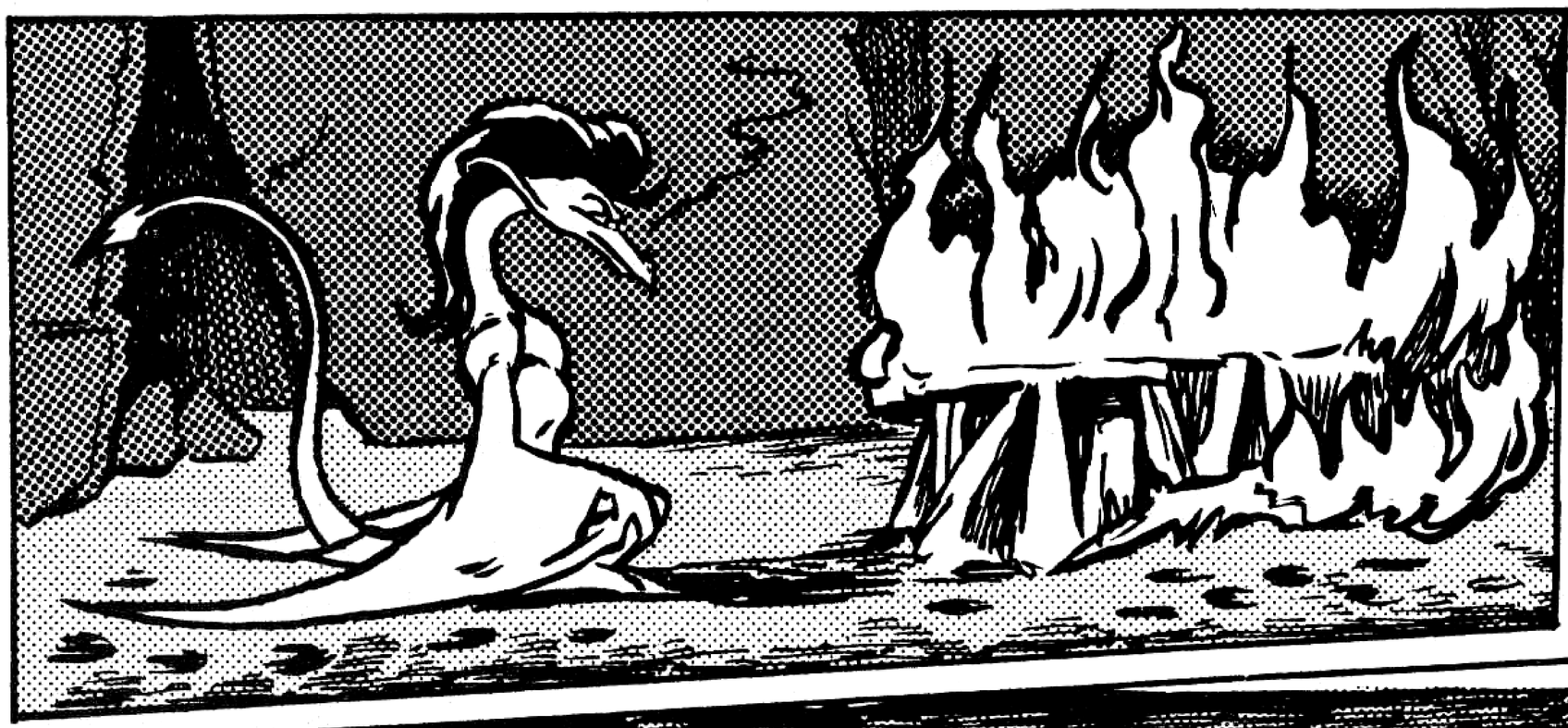


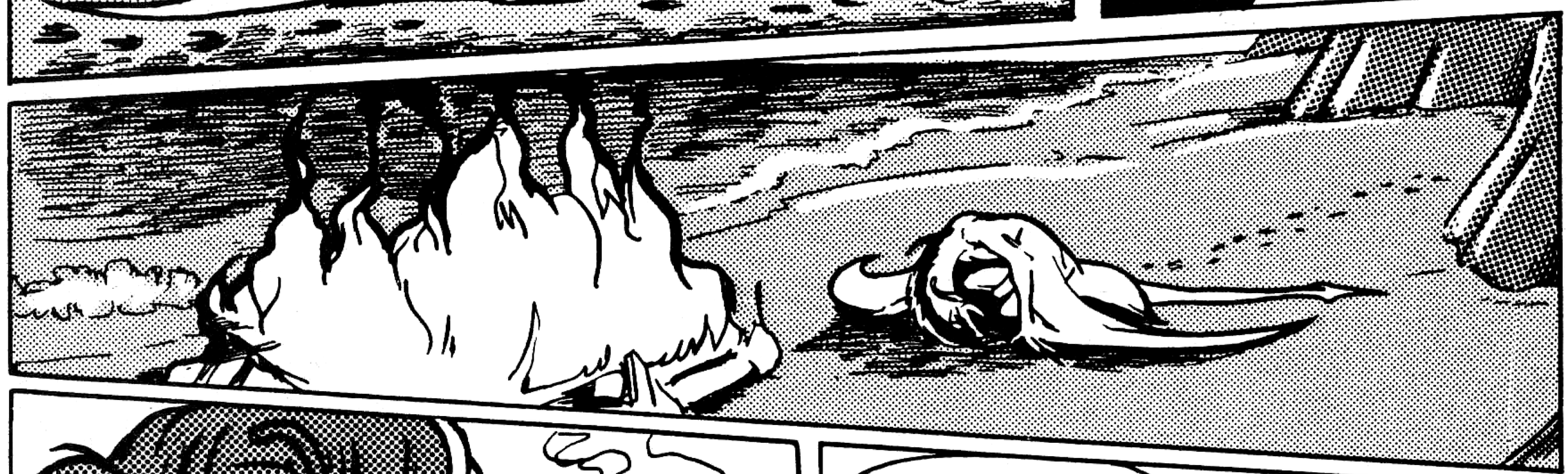

IS THERE ANYTHING MORE WE CAN DO?

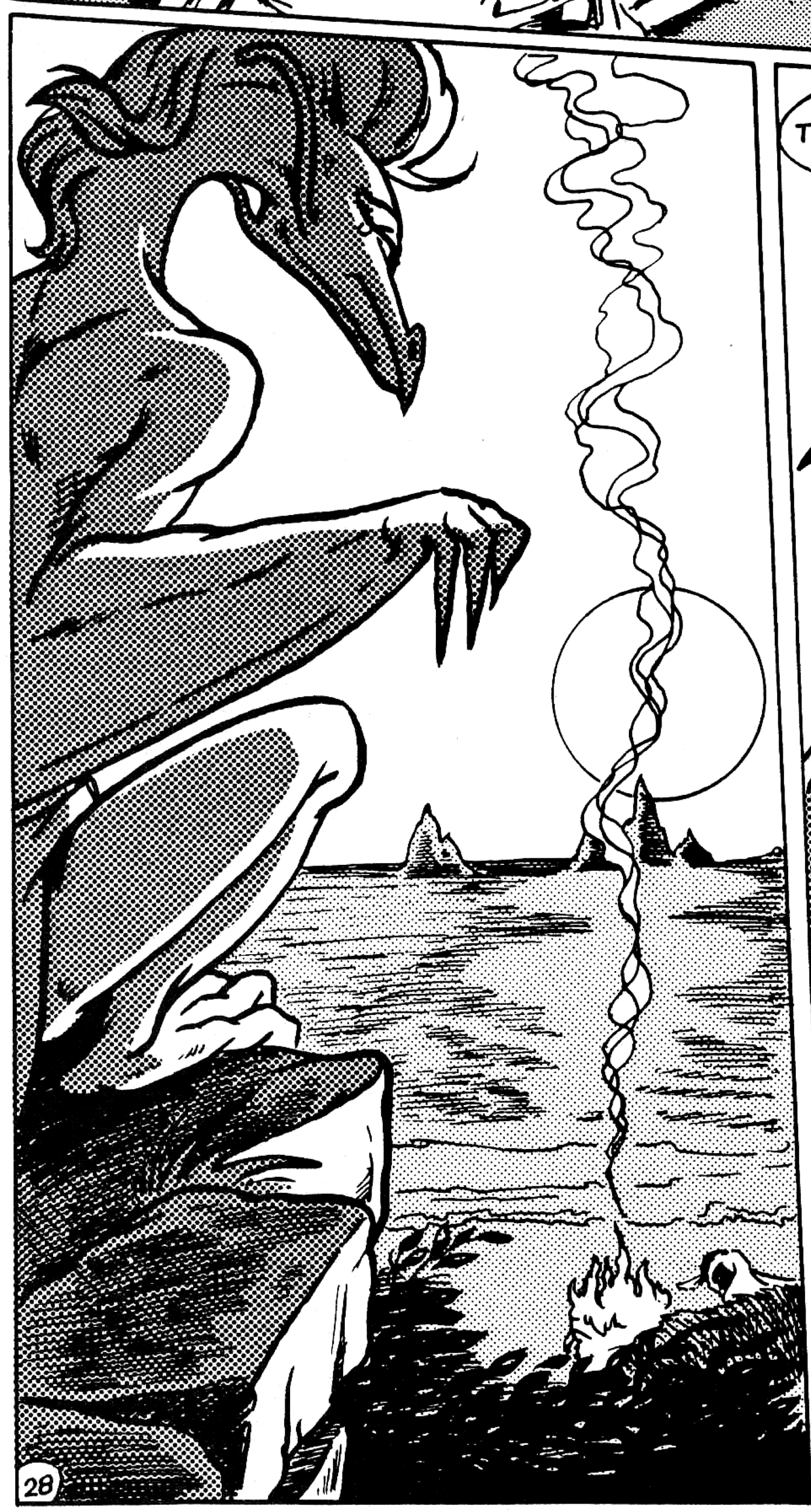
NO THANK YOU, TABBE-SAN. THE REST I MUST DO ALONE, AS HER MATED HUSBAND. SHE SAW ME INTO THE WORLD. I ALONE CAN SEE HER OUT OF IT.

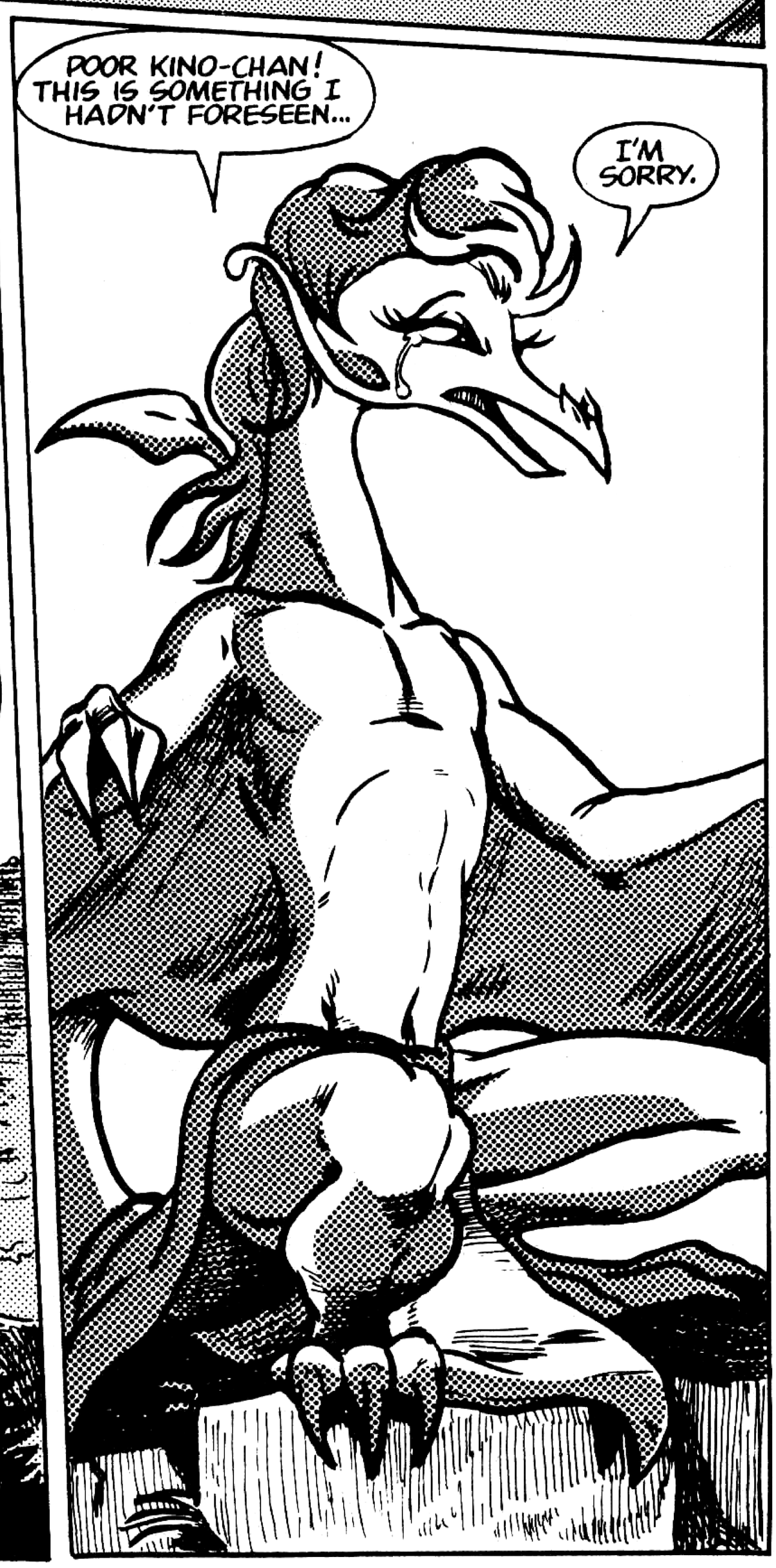
IN FIRE WE ARE BORN, AND IN FIRE WE SHALL DIE...MY FIRE WILL CONSUME HER NOW AND THE WIND WILL CARRY HER ASHES BACK TO THE GOLDEN REALM.
PLEASE LEAVE ME NOW. THIS IS A MATTER FOR BEING ALONE.

FWWEEHM

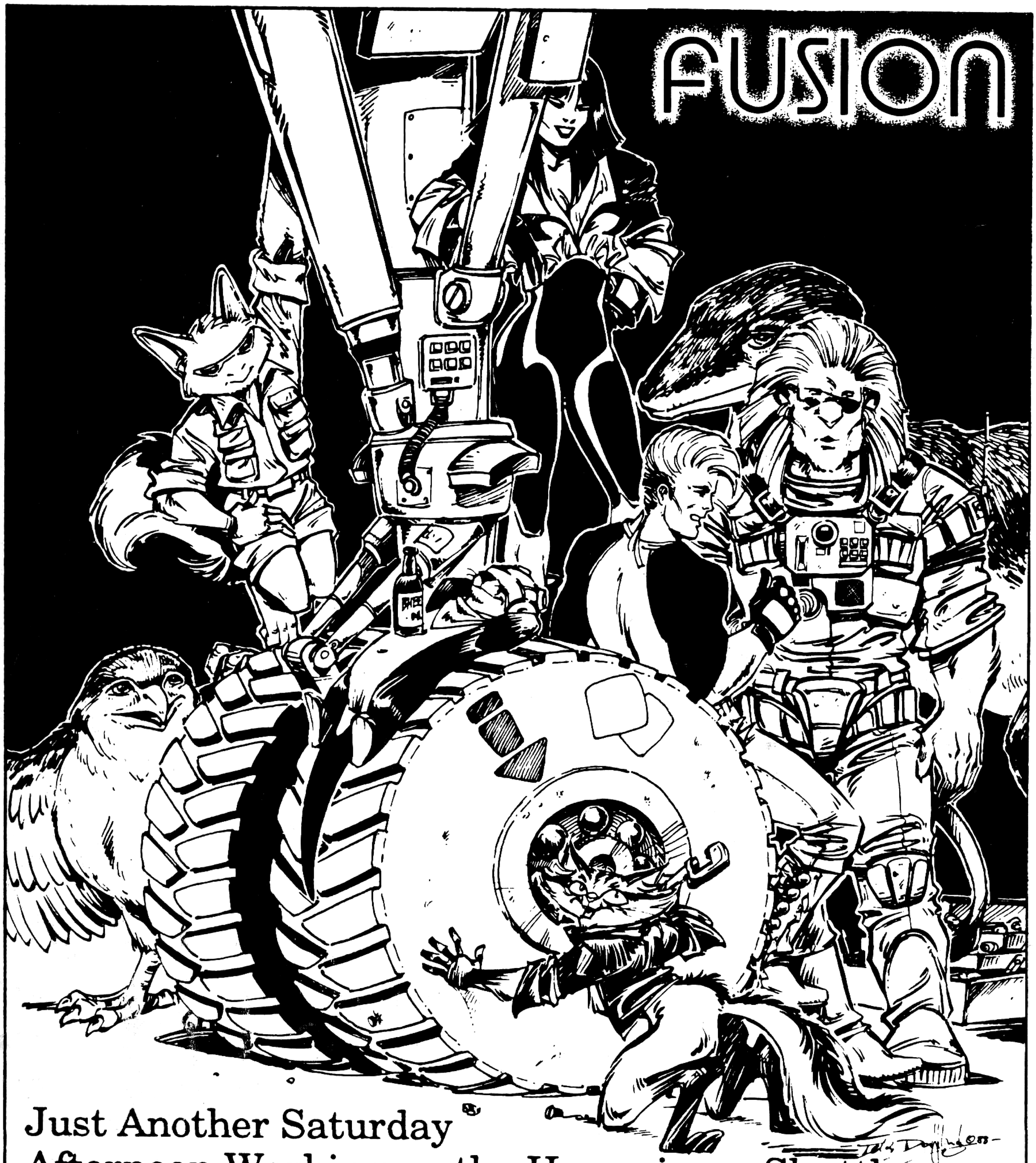







POOR KINO-CHAN! THIS IS SOMETHING I HADN'T FORESEEN...
I'M SORRY.

FUSION



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